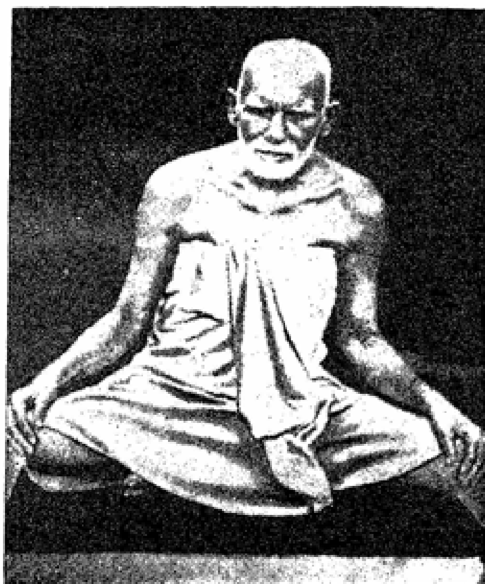


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A Story of Indian Culture



BAHADUR MAL, M.A.,
Ex-Principal, D. A. V. College
Ambala.

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A STORY OF INDIAN CULTURE

A Chart of Diacritical Transliteration of Sanskrit Alphabet

a=अ, *ā*=आ, *i*=इ, *ī*=ई, *u*=उ, *ū*=ऊ,

ṛ=ऋ, *ṝ*=ॠ, *e*=ए, *ai*=ऐ, *o*=ओ, *au*=औ,

aṁ=अं, *aḥ*=अः.

k=क्, *kh*=ख्, *g*=ग्, *gh*=घ्, *ṅ*=ङ्,

c=च्, *ch*=छ्, *j*=ज्, *jh*=झ्, *ñ*=ञ्,

ṭ=ट्, *ṭh*=ठ्, *ḍ*=ड्, *ḍh*=ढ्, *ṇ*=ण्,

t=त्, *th*=थ्, *d*=द्, *dh*=ध्, *n*=न्,

p=प्, *ph*=फ्, *b*=ब्, *bh*=भ्, *m*=म्,

y=य्, *r*=र्, *l*=ल्, *v*=व्,

ś=श्, *ṣ*=ष्, *s*=स्, *h*=ह्,

kṣ=क्ष्, *tr*=त्र्, *jñ*=ज्ञ्,

The General Editor's Note

1. Svāmī Sarvadānandajī

Svāmī Sarvadānandajī to whose sacred memory the present serial is dedicated, was born in 1859 at Bari Bassi, a small town near Hoshiarpur in the Panjāb. He came of a family that had already produced a number of learned scholars and able physicians. He received his school-education at Hariānā, being another small town at some distance from his birth-place. From his early life, he felt a great interest in religious observances and a strong urge for associating himself with saintly persons, devoted to religion. He married, but his household life was cut short, soon after, by the death of his wife. He did not marry a second time, for the keen interest in the pursuit of religion led him, instead, to leave his hearth and home for good so that he might be able to move about freely in search of true saints who could guide him on that path. It was in the course of those wanderings that he once came into contact with a follower of Svāmī

Dayānandajī and had from him the gift of a copy of *Satyārtha-Prakāśa* (Light of Truth), being the masterpiece from the pen of the said mastermind. Through the study of that classic, he was moved to the innermost recesses of his heart and, under that inspiration, set out on a lifelong mission of selfless service of humanity. For full forty-six years, right up to the end of his earthly sojourn which he reached in 1942, he moved on from place to place, preaching, through his own conduct, the importance of right thought and deed. He loved all alike but extended his warm embrace, particularly, to Harijans, being the down-trodden of the caste hierarchy. The caste people hurled at him, out of spite, the nickname of 'Chamāraguru' (Teacher of Cobblers) which he accepted as a compliment.

2. *The Memorial*

Svāmī Sarvadānandajī was associated with our Institute organisation as a Founder Trustee and an Executive Member. He took keen interest in its work and did all he could to help this cause. It was as an humble expression of its gratitude for that long and valuable association that the Institute decided to set up, in his sacred memory, a department of popular cultural study and publication. A special fund to the tune of over Rs. 60,000/- was raised by public subscription for this purpose by the middle of 1947. But, soon after, the Institute suffered, in the wake of the Partition of Panjāb, a huge loss of its assets worth

several lakhs of rupees. Since then, it has made strenuous efforts towards its rehabilitation, but the process is still incomplete. However, when, in 1950, it succeeded in setting up its new printing press, it duly accorded top priority to the establishment of the aforesaid memorial department and started the present serial under the auspices of the same. Seventeen volumes have been issued in this serial before the present one which is the eighteenth one.

3. *The present work*

Principal Bahadur Mal is already known to the readers of this serial through a previous work from his pen, namely, *Mental Health in Theory and Practice*, which has been published in it as the Volume XII. In his present work, our learned friend has essayed a sort of running commentary on the march of Indian culture through the ages, presenting and inter-relating, succinctly but, nevertheless, panoramically, the numerous and varied cultural phenomena that have become manifest and effective at the different stages of this wonderful march. Representing as it does a philosopher's rather than an historian's outlook, this work, small in its volume but great in its approach and comprehension, embodies a quite serious attempt towards a rational appraisement of the historical processes that have been responsible for transforming the Vedic religion into Hinduism and neo-Vedism of to-day.

4. It is my pleasant duty to close this note with an expression of my sincere thanks to those of my colleagues at the Institute through whose hearty co-operation this volume is now seeing the light of the day.

Sadhu Ashram,
HOSHIARPUR,
13th September, 1956 } VISHVA BANDHU

Preface

This book aims at giving a connected picture of the various periods of Indian culture. It begins with a fairly comprehensive account of the political, social, ethical, religious, and philosophical conceptions of the Vedic Aryans, and then goes on to explain how new strands of thought and practice made their appearance, leading, in course of time, to a phenomenal change in the structure of Vedic culture. At every step, an effort has been made to discover the causes, which led to tranformation in the various aspects of this great culture ;—how, for instance, the almost casteless society of the early Aryans became hopelessly divided into myriads of castes and sub-castes in later-day Hinduism ; how the advanced notion of womanhood in Vedic times gradually gave place to a later-day humiliating conception of the position of women in Hindu society, and how almost a new religion of the worship of gods and goddesses arose out of the ashes of ancient Vedic faith. The section on "Vedic religion becomes Hinduism" is chiefly concerned

with tracing the genesis of all later developments in Hinduism, and so it may be regarded as the key-section in the whole book. In this part, light has also been thrown on the creative activity of Hinduism in the fields of literature, science, mathematics and astronomy, philosophy and higher religion, as well as on the spread of Indian culture in foreign lands, from about the first century A.D. to the beginning of the medieval period of Indian history. In the last part of the book, a description has been given of the powerful resurgence, which is taking place in Hindu culture, in the modern period, in all aspects of thought and action. The causes which have led to this mighty awakening have also been given. It is hoped that the book will help in rationally understanding the changes which have taken place in Indian culture at various stages of its career. I have not referred to the political thought in India, in the post-Vedic period, nor have I made any extensive references to the Indian art in its various forms. Such references would have unnecessarily increased the size of the book. Moreover, an account of these cultural aspects can be easily obtained from any one of the numerous excellent books written on these subjects.

We cannot be too grateful to the European writers for the great work done by them in the resuscitation of the ancient thought and religion of India. The work of many Indian scholars in this field, in the present century is no less remarkable. The labours of all these great savants have combined

to give us an insight into the valuable elements of our culture. They all deserve our tribute of warm and sincere admiration.

I am thankful to Prof. Gauri Shankar, M.A., B.Litt., formerly, Principal of the Government College, Dharamsala for critically reading a large part of the manuscript. I have very much profited from his searching remarks on a number of subjects dealt with in the book. I am grateful to Shrī Vishva Bandhu, Shastri, M.A., M.O.L. (Pb.), O.d'A (Fr.), Kt.C.T. (It.), Honorary Director of Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute and General Editor of Sarvadānand Universal Series for having found time, in the midst of heavy pressure of work, to go through this book, and make many valuable suggestions and, also, for having accepted it for publication in the Institute's well-known series, associated with the name of Shrī Svāmī Sarvadānandají of sacred memory. I, however, owe a special debt of gratitude to Shrī Bhīm Dev, Shastri, M.A., M.O.L., Deputy Editor in the Vedic Lexicographical Department of the Institute, for supplying proper diacritical transliteration of Sanskrit words occurring in the book, as well as for minutely reading the proofs before their being sent to the press. A chart of the diacritical signs representing the different sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet is given on page XVIII. But for this help the book would have remained deficient in a very important respect. I also thank some other friends, connected with the Institute Press, who have collaborated in

the reading of the proofs. In spite of all this, however, it has not been possible to avoid some printing errors. The number of these errors would, of course, have been much larger, if these friends had not rendered help. I am thankful to all of them.

I have tried to acknowledge all references. But, through oversight, some of them might have remained unnamed. For that, a due apology is here offered.

It has given me great deal of mental satisfaction to write this book. I shall feel happy, if it gives an equal satisfaction to its readers as well.

HOSHIARPUR
Dated 3-8-1956.

BAHADUR MAL

Contents

BOOK III

Vedic Religion Becomes Hinduism

BOOK IV

Hinduism in Middle Ages

BOOK V

Modern Period



Introduction

The outsiders mostly find it difficult to properly understand the nature of Hinduism. There is so great a diversity of beliefs and rituals, that a person, who makes his first contact with the Indian people, is likely to be bewildered by the complexity and motley character of what goes by the name of Hinduism. Religions, like Christianity and Islam, have definite religious tenets and modes of worship, and though in course of time, a number of sects arose in these religions, their differences were not so acute as to obliterate their fundamental and basic doctrines.

In Hinduism also there are certain essentials, which are interwoven into the creeds of divergent Hindu sects; but they are not apparent on the surface, while the differences are patent to all. To make confusion worse confounded, many Christian missionaries and other interested people have spread all sorts of misconceptions about Hinduism. It is, therefore,

worthwhile to give an account of all those circumstances, which have led to the creation of the present structure of Hinduism, and to trace the development of this great system of thought and practice from its earliest beginnings to the present day. It would also be worthwhile to understand the fundamental ideas, which form the core of Hinduism, and which have kept it alive in spite of the vicissitudes, through which it has passed during all these centuries.

In order to understand the extreme diversity of Hindu religion and thought, as well as the various quaint ideas, superstitions and social customs prevalent amongst the Hindus, we shall have to keep in mind, the large number of races and peoples, who have made up the life of India from remote antiquity down to recent times.

The dominant note of Indian culture comes from the contribution of the Aryan race. But as we survey the broad features of the Indian population, we come across, besides the Aryans, a number of other ethnological types such as the Aboriginals, the Dravidians and the Mongoloids. There are, of course, the mixed types also. All these types have contributed to the shaping of Hinduism as it exists to-day.

It is the view of most scholars, that the Aryans as well as other racial groups migrated into India from outside. The Indo-Aryans are said to have come into India last of all. They conquered the Dravidians, who had similarly conquered the

earlier occupants of India. Dr. B. S. Guha, Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, has recently propounded what is regarded as an authoritative view on this problem.[1] Taking his account as the basis, we may regard the following racial elements as composing the population of India.

(1) The **Negritoes,** who were the first to come to India from Africa. They have practically become extinct in India; but their descendants are still found in the Andamans and possibly in the forests of the extreme South of India with their 'dwarfish stature and frizzly hair'.

(2) The **Aboriginals,** who belong to the racial stock known as proto-australoids. They are said to be an off-shoot of people living on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, or what is now called Palestine. They have more or less mingled with other people and live, in the greater part of the country, as the lower castes of Indian people. They generally speak the languages of the Munda variety, and are more than six millions in number, divided into a number of tribes such as Santals, Bhils, Mundas, Savaras etc.

(3) The **Mongoloids.** They are found in Burma and the Chittagong Hills in Assam, Bhutan and Sikkim. They came in comparatively later times from Tibet and China.

(4) The **Dravidians.** They are found mostly in southern India, in the Kannada, Tamil and Malyalam tracts. They are also said to have come into

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1. Racial Elements in the Population, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1944.

India from a Mediterranean region, and as they came into India, they brought with them the cultures of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.

(5) The last to come into India were the **Indo-Aryans,** who gave to India its Aryan language and laid the foundation of the future civilisation of India. The Aryan element is predominent in the Panjab, Rajputana and the upper Gangetic valley and also among the Citpāvana Brāhmaṇas of Mahārāṣṭra. This element is also found, though mixed, as we go towards the east.

There is, however, no conclusive evidence to show, that the Aryans and the other races came to India from outside. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to assert with certainty, as to what people lived at a particular place in remote antiquity. The migration of a people from one place to another on account of the exigencies of climate or shortage of food supply must have been a common thing in the early history, of man. Whether the Aryans or the other peoples, while they were in a state of barbarism, came to the Indian continent from some other region, can only be a matter of mere conjecture ; but we can state with certainty, that long before they had attained the high degree of civilisation represented in the *Ṛgveda*, the Aryans had been living in the region of the *Saptasindhu.* We do not find any reference or even the barest allusion in the *Ṛgveda* or any other literature of ancient India to this important event of migration, if it ever happened. It is thus clear, that, even, if it were supposed that the Aryans came

from outside India, they must have done so at so early an age, that they lost all memory of this momentous event. Again if the Aryans came from outside, how is it, as a writer puts it, that "in the course of their journey to *Saptasindhu* they left no such record as the Vedic literature in India, elsewhere."

The fact is, that it was from the study of *Ṛgveda*, that the western scholars first came to know about the word Aryan or the Aryan culture. The word is not mentioned anywhere else. The Aryan character of the names of the gods and kings such as *Indra, Varuṇa, Agni, Nāsatyā, Dusrant, Suvardanta*, etc., as found in Babylonian and Egyptian inscriptions, was understood by scholars after their study of the ancient literature of India. If any country called itself the land of the Aryans or *Āryāvarta*, it was only India. Whatever is known at present about the Aryans and their culture, has been obtained from ancient Indian literature.

There is a vast difference of opinion regarding the original home of the Aryans. At one time or another, regions as remote as Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ukraine, the Russian steppes, Caucasia, Central Asia, and India, besides others, have been proposed as the primitive habitation of the Aryans, B. G Tilak suggested that the Aryans originally lived in the Arctic region, because some of the natural phenomena described in the *Ṛgveda* correspond with the phenomena existing near the north pole. But the Aryans were very fond of horses, and horses are not

found anywhere near the north pole. This one fact is a sufficient refutation of Tilak's theory.

The existence of such a large number of divergent views is a clear indication of the fact, that the scholars are as yet far from the truth. Moreover the grounds put forward for the selection of one region or the other, as the original Aryan home, do not in a number of cases, even appear as plausible. The school of thought, which for instance holds, that Germany was the original home of the Aryans, does so on the assumption, that the ancestors of the Aryans possessed blonde or golden hair and blonde hair are the characteristic of the people living in Germany and regions near about Germany. What an argument! Some writers base their conclusions on the existence of some kinds of trees or animals in some places and not in others and so on. The very fact, that what one school regards as a material evidence in favour of its theory is looked upon as of no importance by another school of scholars, should make us hesitate to give ready credence to the view, that the original home of the Aryans lay outside India.

Unless a strong and incontrovertible argument is presented in favour of an opposite view, it is perhaps right to accept the position, strongly supported in all the ancient literature of India; namely, that the Aryans originally lived in the region of *Saptasindhu* i. e. the land watered by Indus, Saraswatī and the well known five rivers of the Panjab.

As the Aryans, after centuries of habitation in

the region of *Saptasindhu*, began to move eastwards, they came in contact with peoples following different cultures and religions. Some of them had developed a very high civilisation, as is clear from the excavations of Mohinjodaro in Sind and Harappa in the Montgomery district of the West Panjab, separated from each other by a distance of about 400 miles. The people of the Indus civilisation, as this newly-revealed civilisation is called, made use of cotton textiles, which came to be known to the western people two or three thousand years later. We also come across a high standard of urban life, 'as seen in the commodious houses, baths, wells and systems of drainage meant for the ordinary citizens, and not known in pre-historic Egypt or Mesopotamia or in any other country in Western Asia, where architecture is chiefly aristocratic, being marked by magnificent palaces. temples and tombs, without spending much thought on the dwellings of the poor or the masses'.[1]

Subsequent excavations have brought to light the same kind of civilisation in a number of other places also. It is thus clear that it was spread over a very extensive region such as the whole of Sind, a part of the Panjab, Kāthiawar and a part of the Gangetic plain.

There are in the *Ṛgveda* itself references to the non-Aryans, who lived in cities strongly protected by forts of very thick walls. The non-Aryans are described as speaking a strange tongue,

1. R. K. Mookerjee : *Hindu Civilisation*, p. 25.

and worshipping different gods. They are spoken of as the opponents of Vedic sacrifices and ordinances. The *Ṛgveda*, at places, speaks of them as phallus-worshippers (*śiśnadevāḥ*). All these references appear to point to the people of the Indus civilisation, specially the reference to the custom of phallic worship current amongst them.

There seem to be no doubt, that the non-Aryans whether they were the civilised Dravidians or the semi-civilised or non-civilised Aboriginal peoples, had cultures of their own, different from that of the Aryans. They worshipped other gods and their mode of worship was their own. They had their own peculiar customs and tabus. A large number of coins have been found in the Sindhu-Valley excavations, the largest number being those of the Goddess Earth. A two-horned image of a male deity has also been found, which some scholars regard as the image of God Śiva. These people were therefore undoubtedly the worshippers of images as contrasted to the Aryans, who had no temples and no images. Their religion consisted simply of the recitation of prayers and the performance of Yajña. As R. K. Mookerjee points out, there has also been found evidence of the worship of trees and animals in the Mohinjodaro excavations. We find represented on seals or stone, the mythical and composite animals, such as human-faced goats, three-headed chemeras, creatures part bull and part elephant. Then there are representations of real animals, such as water buffalo, tiger, bull, elephant, rhinocerous etc. Again, there are

the figures and engravings of animals and birds such as ram, boar, monkey, squirrel, parrot etc. Some of them were mere toys; but others seem to be meant for use as amulets. "Some of these animals" says R.K. Mookerjee "still figure as the vehicles of Hindu deities, as for instance the bull of Śiva, the lion of Durgā, the buffalo of Yama, the ram of Brahma, the elephant of Indra, the wild boar of Gaurī."[1]

We thus find that the religion of the Indus valley people consisted of a large number of features, which are found in present-day Hinduism in some form or another, such as the worship of Earth or *Śakti* and of a male deity resembling Śiva, the worship of animals, trees and phallic symbols, and the practice of magic and charms on a wide scale.

It should be now easy to understand the extremely diversified character of the Indian culture, as we find it to-day. As the Aryans came in contact with the non-Aryans, in their advance towards the east and the south, conflict was bound to take place. There are references to these conflicts in a number of places in the *Ṛgveda* In these conflicts the Aryans proved victorious. Many of the non-Aryans were enslaved and others driven to the mountains and forests or towards South India.

But this state of conflict did not last long. In course of time many of the features of the Aryan religion were accepted by the non-Aryans, such as the *varna-āśrama* system of social organisation, the

1. *Ibid*, p. 22.

ascendancy of Sanskrit language and the religious authority of the Vedic scriptures. On their side the Aryans gave freedom to their non-Aryan compatriots, to follow their own modes of worship and customs. For centuries, the Aryans maintained their religion and culture in their original state of unadulteratedness ; but as the result of a long period of close and intimate inter-social relationships, the synthesis of cultures was bound to follow. There was a gain in many respects, but there was a loss too. The Aryans while assimilating many good things from the non-Aryan sources, adopted a number of undesirable customs and beliefs, which have stuck on to the Hindu culture through all the succeeding centuries.

It is now generally admitted, that the Dravidians have made a notable contribution to the development of Hindu civilisation in many ways. The fundamentals of Indian culture have come to us from the Aryans but the contributions of the non-Aryans are no less remarkable. According to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, about twelve annas in the rupee of Indian culture we owe to non-Aryan sources.

Shri K. M. Munshi says "throughout the History of India, two simultaneous movements have gone on. One owes its origin to the Aryan culture, and operates by virtue of the momentum, which the values of that culture possess. The other wells from the way of of the early Dravidians and other non-Aryan cultures, which got into the frame work of the Aryan culture, modifying its form and content, but not its funda-

mentals. This harmonious blending of both has gone on from age to age."[1]

We shall discuss in the next section, the salient points of the culture of Vedic age. We shall next try to throw light on the causes, which led in succeeding centuries to the transformation of Vedic culture into present-day Hinduism. Lastly we shall describe the cultural renaissance, which began in the later decades of the 19th century and is still going on at a vigorous pace. It seems to the writer, that we are coming back to the spirit of the ancient Vedic culture, very much enriched by the later developments of Indian philosophy and religion, as well as by the impact of western scientific knowledge on Indian thought.



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1. *Introduction to the History and Culture of India*, Vol. II.

BOOK I

Indian Culture in the Vedic Age

CHAPTER I

Our Sources of Information

The Indian culture has its beginnings in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*. Their conceptions provide the foundations, on which the structure of Hindu civilisation is based. By the time, the collection of Vedic hymns known as the *Ṛgveda*, was made, the Aryans had already achieved an advanced civilisation. In the words of Dr. R. K. Mookerjee the *Ṛgveda* "points to a settled people, an organised society, and a full grown civilisation."[1] Max Müller also expresses a similar opinion "Here in the *Ṛgveda*" he says "we have poems, composed in perfect language, in elaborate metre, telling us about gods and men, about sacrifices and battles, about the various aspects of nature, and the changing conditions of

1. *Ibid*. p. 67.

society, about duty and pleasure, philosophy and morality."[1]

The hymns of the Veda are our chief source of information about the religion, the social structure, the economic and political institutions, and the ethical ideals of the ancient Aryans. These achievements are of a high order, and in many respects they are much more advanced than the later phases of Hinduism. Max Müller says, "Supposing that the Vedic hymns were composed between fifteen hundred and one thousand B. C., we can hardly understand, how at so early a date the Indians had developed ideas which to us seem decidedly modern."[2]

Vedic Literature

It consists chiefly of the *Saṁhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇas* the *Ārnnayakas*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Sūtras*.

There are mainly *four Saṁhitās* or collections of hymns known as *Ṛgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Of these four *Sāṁhitās*, the *Ṛgveda* is generally regarded as the oldest collection. The remaining three collections are ascribed to a later date, *Atharvaveda* being the latest of all.

Ṛgveda consists of 10600 verses in 1019 hymns. The hymns are divided into ten Books of unequal length. Macdonnell speaks of *Ṛgveda* as a book of psalms, beautiful hymns addressed to Agni, Vāyu, Indra, Varuṇa, Prajāpati and other names and manifestations of divinity.

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1. *India; What can it teach us*, p. 123. 2. *Ibid*. p. 111.

Sāmaveda is not an independent Veda. Excepting about 70 verses, all the rest of 1603 verses are taken from *Ṛgveda*. They are all musical hymns, meant to be sung, specially during the performance of Soma Sacrifices.

Yajurveda consists of about 2000 verses in 40 Chapters; a large portion of them is from *Ṛgveda*. But almost equal in quantity are the *Yajus* or prose texts, which are sacrificial formulas to be used at sacrifices.

Atharvaveda in its present form, according to the view of most scholars, was not recognised as such till very late. In a number of verses in *Ṛgveda* and *Yajurveda*, only the names of three Vedas are mentioned, the name of the *Atharvaveda* being omitted altogether.[1] In *Atharvaveda* also there are found a number of verses from *Ṛgveda*. It is of special value, since besides containing hymns of religious and sociological importance, it gives the popular beliefs and superstitions of the common people and their faith in charms, amulets and incantations.

Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas. The Brāhamaṇas contain elaborate descriptions of sacrifices as well as long-winded speculations on the magical effects accruing from their correct performance. It is a dry, insipid and prolix literature, perhaps not possessing much value in the present age.

The *Āraṅyakas* are attached to the *Brāhamaṇas* as appendices. They are forest treatises and contain

1. RV. X, 90, 9; YV. XXXI, 6;

symbolic meditations on the various aspects of sacrifice. They were meant for the use of people, who in their old age retired to forest *Āśramas* in search of spiritual knowledge and mental peace.

Upaniṣads. The *Āraṇyakas* serve as a bridge connecting the *Karmakāṇda* of the *Brāhamaṇas* with the *Jñānakāṇḍa* of the *Upaniṣads.* They mark the beginning of religious and philosophical speculation in India. The *Upaniṣads* form the source, from which later philosophical thought and higher religion are derived. Their importance has increased with the passing of time, and they have influenced not only Indian thought ; but many western thinkers in modern times as well.

The Sūtras. They are attempts at condensing and systematizing in brief formulas the prolific contents of the *Brāhamaṇas.* They are divided into *Śrauta, Gṛhya* and *Dharma Sūtras,* dealing respectively with sacrifices, periodic sacraments or *Saṁskāras* and duties pertaining to various *Varaṇas* and *Āśramas* of life.

Besides these Sūtras which are collectively known as *Kalpasūtras,* there are others, known as *Chandas, Nirukta, Jyotiṣa Sūtras* etc., the main concern of which is to help the proper understanding of Vedic hymns. This became necessary, as with the passing of time the language of the Aryans underwent certain changes, and deviated to an appreciable extent from the language of the Vedas.

The Age of Vedic Culture

It is very difficult to be definite regarding the date of the composition of the Vedic hymns. Max Müller and Keith are of the opinion, that the Vedic hymns were composed between fifteen hundred and one thousand B. C. A new light on this question is thrown by the discovery of some inscriptions at Boghas Koi in Asia Minor, recording a treaty between the King of Hittites and the King of Metani. The names of the gods *Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa* and *Nāsatyas* are mentioned in the treaty. These names are undoubtedly of *Ṛgvedic* origin. It therefore follows that the *Ṛgveda* existed much earlier than 1400 B. C. which is the accepted date of the treaty concluded at Boghas Koi. It may be assumed that the *Ṛgvedic* culture must have existed for many centuries in India before it could migrate to Asia Minor and get itself established among the people there. "On even a modest computation" says Dr. Mookerjee, "we should come to 2500 B. C. as the time of the *Ṛgveda*."[1] Tilak and Jacobi are of the view that the *Ṛgveda* is as old as 4500 B. C. and A. C. Das in his *Ṛgvedic India* concludes, on the basis of geological evidence, that the *Ṛgvedic* hymns were composed not less than 25000 years ago.

The Indian tradition places the actual revelation of the Vedic hymns to a very remote period, so that no definite year can be assigned to it. In the presence of a great variety of conflicting views on this subject,

1. *Hindu Civilization*, p. 67.

all that can be said at present is, that the Vedas belong to a great antiquity and represent one of the oldest or perhaps the oldest culture in the world.

According to Indian traditions, the Vedas are Apaurashya or divinely inspired and were revealed to great sages in the beginning of creation. The sages to whom they are attributed were mere receptacles or bearers of the divine word.

The Veda as *śruti* or revelation is contrasted to the *smṛtis*, which are the works of human authors and therefore inferior to the Vedas in rank and authority.

The period of *Brāhmaṇas*, *Sūtras* and important *Upaniṣads* is generally regarded to range between 1000 B. C. and 500 B. C. The Buddhist period begins with 500 B. C. and marks the end of the Vedic age.

We have already in the beginning of the chapter referred to the view of Max Müller, according to whom, we meet with, in the Vedas, ideas, "which to us seem decidedly modern." He even says, that they appear as if they were the ideas of the Nineteenth century. The truth of this remark will be borne home to us, as we study one after the other, the political, economic, social and cultural institutions of the ancient Aryans,



CHAPTER II

Political and Economic Institutions

(A) King and the State

Monarchy seems to be the common form of Government in Vedic times. There are references, here and there, to the existence of *gaṇas* or Republics, but kingship was the prevailing type. There is a frequent mention of *rājans* in the Vedas. In the *Dāna-stutis* in the *Ṛgveda,* there are frequent references to the *rājans.* At first the kingdoms were small, confined most probably to a single tribe, but gradually larger kingdoms emerged, as the result of conquest and political consolidation. Expressions like *samrāṭ* (Emperor) or *viśvasya bhuvanasya rājan* 'The Monarch of the whole World' occur at places, indicating the existence of large territorial units under single rulers.

Kingship was elective in the beginning and remained so far a long time. Even when it became usual for a son to succeed the father, it was necessary at the time of coronatian to obtain the consent of the

people through their representatives. Thus the principle of election was in a sense operative at the time of each fresh coronation (RV. X 124. 8). The son of a former king was chosen only, if he was otherwise physically and mentally suitable in every way. In the *Atharvaveda* III 4, the following directions are addressed to the King :- "Unto thee hath come the kingdom, with splendour rise forward, Lord of the people. As sole king do though rule, Let all the directions call thee, O King. Let thou be waited upon and let homage be paid to thee. Let the people choose thee for Kingship." There is another hymn in *Ṛgveda* X. 173, from which it appears that the security of the Kings' position depended in the good will of his subjects.

Kingship in the Vedic times was based upon popular will, and because of this fact, as well as for his heroic and noble qualities, the King was a highly honoured and respected head of his people.

The elders, or the members of political assemblies could even dethrone and exile a king, if he proved himself unworthy of the great honour. There are a number of references to exiled monarchs in the *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda.* In *Atharvaveda* IV, 22, we are told that some times, there were many candidates for kingship. The defeated candidates gave a good deal of trouble to the king by their intrigues. A prayer is offered that all these enemies of the king may be destroyed.

The principle of election in this sense continued to be in operation even in later times, though with the

increase in the size of kingdoms, there was a corresponding increase in the power and majesty of kings. We find in the second chapter of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, that King Daśaratha sought the consent of the counsel of elders at the time of installing Rāma as heir apparent, and later on Bharata, the younger brother of Rāma, was asked by the same council to rule the kingdom in the absence of Rāma, who was then in exile.

In *Mahābhārata* also, we read of the election of Śantanu as against Devāpi, and of Pāṇḍu as against Dhṛtarāṣṭra, though he was the elder brother but blind. The tradition of election was kept up in some form or the other throughout the Vedic period, and even in later times, when for instance Harś-vardhana in the 7th century obtained kingship through election by the ministers and magistrates, who represented the people.

The earlier Governments therefore were all democratic in nature, though, of course, the methods of election and of the expression of public opinion on all matters of importance were naturally different from those obtaining at the present time.

Checks upon the Power of Kings

Sabhā and Samiti. A part from the principle of election mentioned above, the powers of kings were controlled by the authority vested in political assemblies known as *sabhās* and *samitis*. It is not easy to distinguish between *sabhā* and *samiti* and to

mark off, their political functions. According to some writers, they meant the same thing. According to others the *samiti* was a popular assembly, which could be attended by all, irrespective of any considerations of rank or wealth, class or sex. The word *samiti* occurs in a number of verses in the *Ṛgveda*, as for instance in I, 95.8 and X. 91.6. One can get an idea of the *samiti* from the following description: "Flowing together from every side, the people came in streams to the *samiti* (RV. IX. 92.6)." It was attended by the king as well as the nobles. The election of the king, in all probability, took place in a session of the assembly. "The *samitis* were held on special and important occasions in capital towns, and attended by all the people living in the town as well as the interior villages."[1] *Sabhās* on the other hand were local assemblies in each town and village. The important persons of the village or the town met, whenever they liked, to discuss and arrive at decisions on all important questions pertaining to the welfare of the people of the locality (RV. VI. 28.6). It also exercised judicial and legal functions. On other occasions it served as a club house, where people met every day for social and recreational purposes (RV. X, 34,6; VI. 28,6). The *sabhā* was thus a local body, *samiti* on the other hand was an august assembly, for the transaction of important business pertaining to the state as a whole. The *sabhā* was an assembly of rich, influential and learned people of a village or a town and it was the ambition of every father, that his son

1. A. C. Das, *Rigvedic Culture*, p. 328.

would some day be a member of the *sabhā* or a *sabhya*. The word *sabhya*, used in the sense of a cultured person can be regarded as derived from the original meaning of *sabheya*, or one who is worthy of an assembly.

Sabhā and *samiti* have been referred to, in many verses of *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda*. They are spoken of as the two daughters of Prajāpati, whom the learned people were eager to woo. The young men cultivated the art of oratory, so that they could make a mark in the debates of these assemblies. It was also the desire of every body, that harmony and goodwill should prevail in the discussions of *samitis* and *sabhās*. Says a verse in the *Ṛgveda* X, 191.4: "May your decisions be unanimous, your minds being of one accord. May the thoughts of all be united so that there may be a happy agreement among all." We have the following characterisation of these assemblies in *Atharvaveda* III. 30. 5 and 6: "Here the men move in a spirit of freedom and joyousness. They speak sweet words in an effort to persuade or to please their colleagues, or to win them to their sense of duty. Eating and drinking, they take counsel together, and worship the goddess of concord." The king who presided over the meetings of the *samitis*, was expected to bring the deliberations to a successful conclusion, and as for as possible to bring about a consensus of opinion among the members assembled on the occasion.

The Coronation Oath. The king after election had to undergo the ceremony of consecration. It was an impressive ceremony and lasted for several days. It

was attended by the representatives of all classes of people as well as by officers of the State, and was regarded as complete only, if the co-operation of all people was forthcoming. His principal duties were laid before the king, when the officiating priest acclaimed that he was Mitra in kindness, Varuṇa in virtue, and Indra in valour and justice. The king took a solemn vow, that he would rule his subjects with justice and impartiality; lest the wrath of God should descend upon him and destroy him and his family on account of the violation of the solemn promises which he had made to the people.

In *Mahābhārata* in the *Śānti Parva,* the oath is worded as follows:— "I shall always consider my country as the highest God. I shall follow unhesitatingly whatever is prescribed as law by the Rājanīti. Never shall I go by my own sweet will." The coronation oath made the king subordinate to law.

The Purohita. The *Purohita* was another important factor, whose advice on religious and other matters was always sought by the king. A selfless and noble minded person as he usually was, his advice was of the utmost value to the king. He even accompanied the king to the field of battle.

The king was also as a rule dependent upon the aristocratic nobles for help during war. They supplied him with all sorts of military aid and economic resources.

The following verses from a hymn of *Ṛgveda* (X, 173) clearly indicate that the king owed his

stability to the consent and goodwill of the people :— "I have consecrated these (*Rājā*), come amongst us; be steady and unvacillating. May all thy subjects desire thee (for their king); may the kingdom never fall from thee.

Come into this (kingdom), mayst thou never be deposed, unvacillating as a mountain; stand firm here like Indra, establish thy kingdom in this world."

Duties of the King

The king was the symbol of justice in the State. In *Ṛgveda* X 124, 8 we are told that the people who do not chose a king for themselves, to lead them against the enemy, always remain miserable. The king was to maintain peace and order, and protest his subjects from all kinds of injuries. He himself was expected too be an embodiment of *dharma*, to be an example to his subjects in righteous living and to be ever watchful over the welfare of his subjects. He was further to see that his subjects trod the path of righteousness and that there was contentment and prosperity all around. For this reason, he came to be endowed with divine qualities. He is spoken of in one of the verses in *Ṛgveda* as "Varuṇa ruling over men, Indra slaying the Asuras, and Tvaṣṭā giving vitality to all beings."

Important Officers of the State

The chief among the state officers were the *Purohita*, the royal priest and the *Senānī*, the Commander-in-chief of the army (RV. VII. 60, 12, IX

96·1). In later Vedic texts there is mention of the *grāmaṇī* the village head; the *saṅgrahītā* the treasurer and the *Sūta* or master of the horse and head of cavalry. In *Yajurveda*, *bhāgadugha* and *aksāvāpa* are also mentioned, who were revenue collector and accountant, respectively. *Takṣan* and *rathakāra* that is the architect and the engineer (the maker of chariots) also were important officers. The officers were known as *ratnins* or the Jewels of State, and the king was expected to administer the State with the help of these ministers.

A word may be added about the importance of the office of the Purohita. He wielded a great influence over the king and his ministers and officers. The names of two great Purohitas, Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra have come down to us from very ancient times, who were held in great veneration by the kings whose Purohitas they were. The Purohita belonged to the class of Ṛṣis or sages, who played a most important part in the lives of the people. These sages were responsible for progress in all directions. A. C. Das writes, "It was they, who domesticated the cattle, discovered the use of fire, invented the plough, learnt and taught the art of agriculture, invented and manufactured various implements, ... evolved the institution of marriage and established it on a firm and sure basis and lifted up human hopes and aspirations from the fleeting, evanescent and parishable things of this world to the attainment of calm serene and everlasting *ānanda*, that knows no flow or ebb, and is centered in and co-extensive with

Brāhmaṇa, the great and indefinable."[1]

It was on account of the high character of these *Ṛṣis*, that the kings and the people alike paid their homage to them and held them in great respect. The kings had implicit faith in these sages and always welcomed their guidance and advice in matters of State. As long as the Brāhmaṇs maintained their high standard of moral purity and unselfishness, throughout the Vedic period and even in later times, India remained the custodian of a lofty culture, characterised by spiritual and moral values.

Law and Property

These are two very important institutions by which civilised Governments maintain wholesome social relations among their peoples. Laws are a recognised set of rules, which the State makes it obligatory for the people to observe. "In the absence of law" says Bertrand Russell, "there is anarchy involving the use of naked force by muscular individuals, and although laws may be bad, they can seldom be so bad as to be worse than anarchy."

Private property means that a person has a right to enjoy the product of his labour and to use his possessions in the way he likes, provided it does not interfere with the similar rights of other people. It also involves the right of a person to leave his property to his children before or after his death. Both these institutions existed in Vedic times. The king in the Vedic period not only protected

1. *Rigvedic Culture*, p. 394.

his subjects against his enemies, but also maintained law and order within the State, and looked after the welfare of the people. He personally presided over the judicial courts and pronounced judgments against the evil doers.

The Code of Justice.

We do not know much about the penal code followed in those times. The codes of nations in different times and at different places have naturally differed from one another. But every civilised community evolves its own penal code in order to administer justice to the satisfaction of the people concerned. If it satisfies the people, it may be regarded as more or less a just penal code for that period.

It is very difficult to give a satisfactory definition of 'justice.' The meaning has differed at different times : what was held as just in an earlier epoch may no longer be so regarded in later times. It would therefore be safe to say, that a political code is a just code, if the people among whom it obtains, regard it as such.

The Vedic society had its own legal code, and there is nothing to show that the people had any complaints against it. Anti-Social elements exist in every society and so it was in the Vedic times also. There were thieves and robbers, who carried on their usual occupation (RV. VI, 28, 3). Sometimes when the thieves came to a village in a body and drove away the cattle, the villagers pursued them and a free

fight ensued. The thieves, of course, were punished when caught. The practice of putting them in stocks is referred to in *Ṛgveda* (VII, 86, 5). They were also occasionally branded on their backs (RV. V, 79, 9). In serious cases, capital punishment was also inflicted. In England even as late as the 18th century, capital punishment was awarded for petty thefts and other similar crimes.

We come across the custom of paying *vaira-deya* or 'wergeld' to the relatives of a murdered person. It was a compensation paid in the form of cows, bulls and other articles for the crime of killing a man. This system served a useful purpose in so far as it put a check upon the continuance of blood feud from generation to generation, as was the case in early primitive society.

The crimes recognised in Vedic literature vary greatly in importance: "They include the slaying of an embryo (*bhrūṇa*), the slaying of a man and the slaying of a Brāhmaṇa, a much more serious crime. Treachery is mentioned in the *Pañcaviṁśa Brāhmaṇa* as being punishable by death. But there is no trace of an organised criminal justice vested either in the king or in people."[1]

Of course the people of the modern age cannot regard this code as a satisfactory one. But it would be wrong to say, as the authors of Vedic Index seem to suggest that there was no organised criminal justice in Vedic times. The very fact that kingship and political institutions like the *sabhās* and *samitis*

1. *Vedic Index*, pp. 391, 392.

existed, shows clearly that there was a code of criminal and civil justice, which was responsible for maintaining harmony and order in the State.

Civil disputes regarding inheritance, land, debt, sale, barter etc. were generally decided by the king according to customary law. There occurs a word *madhyamaśi* (sitting in the middle) in *Ṛgveda* X, 97, 12, which probably stands for the idea of arbitration. "For non-payment of a debt, a debtor could be enslaved (RV. X, 34) and even bound by the creditor to a post, presumably as a means to put pressure on him or his friends to pay the debt."[1]

There is nothing in the *Ṛgveda* to show that any discrimination was made between one person and another on the basis of caste, as came to be the case later on. In later times a heavier punishment was meted out, for the same offence, to a person of a lower caste than to that of a higher caste. There was freedom amongst the Vedic Aryans, for an individual to choose an occupation of his liking, and it often happened that the members of the same family followed different occupations. Naturally under these circumstances, there was bound to be an equality, before law, of all persons.

The Principle of Taxation

The king is described in many Vedic verses as living in great pomp and splendour, and adorned with jewels and gold (RV. X, 78, 1 ; 85, 8 ; VIII, 5, 38). The royal elephant on which the king rode when he went

1. A. C. Das, *Rigvedic Culture*, p. 438.

out for hunting, or in a procession on certain festive occasions, was bedecked with costly jewels and ornaments of gold and silver.

The king himself led his armies in times of war, and in those times while the Aryans were establishing themselves in ever-expanding territories, the occasions for fighting against the former occupants of those lands were frequent. The people naturally had to contribute to the maintenance of armies as well as to keep the king and his court in royal splendour and magnificence. Mostly the people paid their taxes willingly, but sometimes on special occasions, when larger contributions were wanted, some force was used to get the necessary supply from unwilling subjects (RV. 1, 64,4 ; IX, 7, 5). This was not a common thing. Ordinarily, persuasion was used to get the requisite supplies in times of war. Tribute was also collected from the hostile tribes, which had been conquered (RV. VII, 6,5 ; 18, 19).

Taxes on the whole were so adjusted as to cause the least inconvenience to the people. The king knew, that exorbitant taxation would make him lose the sympathy of the people and might ultimately cost him his throne. In a democratic set up, the needs and wishes of the subjects have always to be kept in view. In the *Śāntiparva* Chap. 87 of *Mahābhārata* the principle of taxation has been very beautifully formulated as follows :— "As the bee collects honey from the flower, without doing any injury to it, as a doctor insensibly draws blood from the body, or as a

tigress catches hold of the neck of her cub between her teeth without hurting it, so should the king inperceptively collect his revenue without oppressing or annihilating his people."

The Idea of Sovereignty

Though there is no discussion of the source of sovereignty in the early Vedic literature, the actual practice of political institutions shows that sovereignty resided in the people. The democratic principle of the election of kings as well as the check which the political assemblies like the *sabhās* and *samitis* exercised on the powers of kings, lead to the conclusion that sovereignty existed in the people themselves.

When kingdoms grew large as a result of conquest and political consolidation, the power of kings increased, and there was a corresponding decrease in the power of the people ; but it seems that all through the period of Hindu supremacy, right upto the Muslim conquest of the country, there was always some sort of restraint on the autocratic powers of the king. We do not come across any glaring instances of sheer autocracy among the kings of India, as we find among the pharoahs of Egypt or the despotic kings of Europe in the medieval age. The ministers, the Kshatriya nobles, the wise Brāhmaṇas, and learned councillors played an important part in maintaining kingship on a democratic basis, and putting a healthy restraint on autocratic tendencies, whenever they manifested themselves.

We also find the kings acting up to their coronation pledges, looking after the welfare of their people and administrating justice impartially according to recognised law. We find, appearing on the stage of India at different periods a noble galaxy of kings like Rama, Yudhiṣtra, Chandra Gupta, Aśoka, Vikramāditya, Harśa and many others whose illustrious names adorne the pages of Indian history.

(B) Economic Conditions

Agriculture

The economic life of the ancient Aryans revolved round agriculture. The earth was regarded as the repository of all precious things, grain, cotton, water and other necessities of life were yielded by the earth and so did gold, silver, copper, Iron etc. come out of its bowels. There are numerous verses in the *Ṛgveda* in praise of *Pṛthvī* or Earth, the source of wealth and prosperity.

The people cultivated barley, wheat, rice, beans, sesamun etc. (RV. V, 85, 3 ; VI. 13, 4). Ploughing was done as it is done even to-day, by creating furrows in the land by means of a plough-share drawn by oxen. A great sanctity was attached to the cow, which has been referred to as *aghnyā* (not to be killed) in several passages in the *Ṛgveda*. Each family kept large herds of cattle, so that it can be presumed that there was no dearth of milk, curd and ghee in the Aryan homes. Sheep were also reared and their wool was used for making garments (RV. X, 26, 6).

Besides a class of weavers, whose profession it was to weave yarn into cloth, the women folk also wove cloth to meet some of the requirements of their families (RV. II, 3, 6). In *Ṛgveda* V, 67, 6, the mother is described as weaving cloth for her sons.

According to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, six, eight, twelve and even twentyfour oxen were sometimes yoked to a plough, which naturally must have been a very large and heavy one. Perhaps it was used to bring virgin and hard soil under cultivation. The plough land was called *urvara or kṣetra.* The plough was drawn by oxen in teams of six, eight or even twelve (RV. VIII 6, 48 ; X, 101, 4).[1] We also read of manures being spread over the fields. There is also a mention of the castration of draft oxen. There were extensive pasture lands left open for the use of cattle. All the higher classes were interested in cattle-keeping and regarded them as a very precious possession. Reverence for the cow rapidly spread amongst all classes of people. There is also a mention of wells for irrigation purposes (RV. X, 101, 7). "The water for irrigation also came from lakes (*hrada*) and canals (*kulyā* ⌊ RV. III, 45, 3 ; X, 99,4 ⌋).[2]

Trade and Commerce

The Aryans carried on trade with distant countries (RV. I, 56, 2). There was inland trade as well. The produce of land and industry was transported from one district to another, by means of bullocks, pack-

1. Mookerjee, *Ibid.*, p. 73.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

horses, asses, camels and even dogs (RV. VIII, 44, 28). A special breed of dogs was highly valued in outside countries, and there was a regular export of these hunting animals to Persia and Babylonia.

The merchants, with their articles laden on beasts of burden, went from place to place, selling their merchandise as well as buying the products of one place, to be sold at other places. A special class of traders called *Paṇis* is mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*, who are often denounced for their greed and selfishness.

The money-lending business is also indicated. There is a reference in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* to persons, who live by usury. It is not definitely known, whether coins were in use. Cows were generally used as units of exchange. There however occurs a term *niska*, which originally meant a gold ornament to be worn around the neck. It consisted of round gold pieces, strung together in the form of a necklace. It seems, that these round gold pieces of fixed weight, in course of time came to be used as coins. There is a reference to such a use in *Ṛgveda* (1, 126, 2). In *Atharvaveda* (XX, 127, 3), the use of coins is clearly mentioned. Again in *Ṛgveda* (VIII, 2, 41), a Ṛṣi praises a king for having given him a large number of coins on two different occasions. There also occurs a word *manā* most probably in the sense of a coin in a verse in *Ṛgveda*, VIII, 78, 2 : "O Indra, bestow upon us jewels, cattle, horses and *manās* of gold."

There was some sea-borne trade as well. In *Ṛgveda*, IV, 55, 6, there is a reference to persons who

go to the ocean for gain. There is also reference to eastern and western oceans in *Atharvaveda* (X, 136, 5). There is no doubt, that the ancient Aryans carried on sea trade even as early as the *Ṛgvedic* times.

Occupations and Industries

In the *Ṛgvedic* times, society was divided into a number of classes, according to the vocations which were followed. But there was no hard and fast line of distinction between one class and another. "Many *Rājanyas* are found among the poets of the *Ṛgveda*, and members of the three higher classes were not rarely found engaged in cattle breeding during times of peace, and in fighting during times of war. Money lending was practised chiefly by the Vaiśyas, but also occasionally by Brāhmaṇas."[1] We thus find that the division of various occupations among different classes was only a rough distribution, and it was not strictly adhered to.

We find references to a large number of arts and crafts in the *Ṛgveda*. There were carpenters, smiths, potters, weavers, goldsmiths, makers of flower garlands, tanners, barbers, physicians, drummers and musicians, and many others (RV. IX, 112, ; X. 72, 2 ; I, 122, 2 ; X, 26, 6, etc.). Each *grāma* or village was a self-contained unit with respect to the provision of all sorts of necessities and services. In *Brāhamaṇa* texts, we find mention of persons plying such arts as those of basket makers, jewellers, female embroiderers, ferry-men, money lenders, makers of bow strings and so on.

1. V. M. Apte, *Vedic Age*, p. 397.

Implements and vessels of iron, copper, earthen-ware and stone are also mentioned and must have been locally manufactured. Gold and silver utensils were used by aristocratic classes. We thus find that the Aryan society of the Vedic age was economically a fairly advanced society. The people had enough to eat and to clothe themselves with. The rich land of *Saptasindhu* was very fertile and yielded an ample supply of all kinds of crops. Wool was produced in large quantities, out of which woolen garments of all descriptions were manufactured. Economically the people were well off. There was no dearth of land; so everybody could possess as much of it as he could cultivate. The *Ṛgveda* X, 75, 8, very clearly brings before us the condition of high prosperity in which the Vedic Aryans lived: "The *Sindhu* is rich in horses, rich in chariots, rich in clothes, rich in gold ornaments well made, rich in food, rich in wool ever fresh, abounding in *sīlama* plants, and the auspicious rivers wear honey growing flowers."

Towns and Cities

There are some scholars, who hold the view that there were no big towns in the Vedic age, and that the Aryan culture was primarily a rural culture. It is true that there is no direct mention of towns and cities in the *Ṛgveda*. *Ṛgveda*, however, is chiefly a book of psalms and prayers, and from the fact that there is no direct reference to towns and cities, it does not follow that the Aryans had not learnt the art of town construction. There is no lack of indirect

evidence to this effect. We find a frequent mention of *sabhās* and *samitis* in the *Ṛgveda*. The *samiti* was a sort of parliament, in which the elders from all parts of the kingdom met, in order to transact legislative and political business. It can be easily conceived that the place where the *samiti* met, and where the king held his court, could not be a mere village or a small assemblage of families.

We have referred above to a number of arts and industries, as mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* and the *Yajurveda*. Some of the arts such as those of jewellers, garland-makers, embroiderers, goldsmiths, makers of gold and silver vessels etc. cannot flourish in mere villages. There is also a clear reference to inland and foreign trade, and even to sea-borne trade. It points to the building of large boats and sea vessels, clearly commerce or trade on this scale, carries with it the implication, that there were fairly big and flourishing cities in those times. Trade and city-life are closely inter-related; as there cannot be much scope for the growth of trade and commerce in villages.

In the *Ṛgveda*, beside the word *grāma* the word *pur* is also used. Though we cannot be sure of the exact sense in which the word *pur* is used in the *Ṛgveda*, the general meaning of the word is taken to be a town, as contrasted to *grāma*, which means a village. The mention of strongholds or forts also points to the existence of towns. Each village cannot presumably have a fortress of its own. In *Atharvaveda* a part of the house exclusively used as ladies quarters,

is described as *patnīnāṁ sadana.* Among the articles of furniture, pillows, cushions, a bed and a couch are mentioned. The rich and aristocratic people are described as possessing beautiful chariots, drawn by two and some times by four horses. Horse riding is also mentioned as a common practice. Music, both vocal and instrumental, and dancing were popular sources of entertainment. There were professional musicians as well, who used various types of musical instruments such as flute, harp or lyre, cymbals, drums etc. Chariot-racing as well as horse-racing were favourite amusements. It is mentioned in *Atharvaveda*, that a semicircular course was laid out for these races and prizes were awarded to the winners. All this points to the existence of populous towns and cities, which only could provide a patronage for various arts and sports.



CHAPTER III

Social Conditions

(A) Caste in Vedic Society

The caste system is a unique institution among the Hindus. In its present form, it is based on birth, and marriage can take place only within one's own caste group. While the caste system has led to the division of Hindu society into a multitude of exclusive groups, and deprived it of inner cohesion and sense of unity, it has done the utmost harm to the classes known as the *Śūdras* and the Untouchables. These people could not hope for many centuries in the past to rise to a higher status, or in any way to ameliorate their position.

We now know, that there was no such caste system amongst the ancient Aryans. They were as A. C. Das says: "divided into classes and not castes, and each class was named after the work it had to perform."[1] In the same family one member followed the occupation of a priest, and another that of a

1. *Rigvedic Culture*, p. 128.

soldier or an artisan or any other occupation. No odium was attached to any work whatsoever. Manual work was held no less dignified than intellectual work. A poet says in one of the hymns in the *Ṛgveda* (IX, 112): "I am a poet, my father is a physician and my mother a grinder of corn. All of us desiring wealth and gain, pursue various means." The poet does not feel any stigma in the fact, that his mother did the work appropriate to a labourer. The ṛṣis, who rose to the highest rank as a result of their learning and spiritual eminence, were anxious to have sons who could defeat the enemy in battle *Ṛgveda* (V, 23, 1. VI, 31, 1). We read in *Ṛgveda* (X, 102) that Ṛṣi Moudgalya took up arms and chased the robbers, who had stolen his cows. Viśvāmitra, though born in a Kṣatriya family became a Brāhmaṇa priest. The descendents of Bhṛgu Ṛṣi are described in *Ṛgveda* (X, 39, 14) as master-carpenters, skillful in the art of making chariots. Ṛbhus, the gods are celebrated as workers in wood and metal, which indicates an appreciation of skill and craftsmanship. The arts of a blacksmith or a weaver or those of rope making, ship-building, pottery, leather-tanning, husbandry etc. are highly spoken of in the *Ṛgveda*. Every work was held noble, and dignity of labour was fully recognised. The individual could follow any occupation according to his aptitude and bent of mind.

We thus find, that the four Varṇas were based upon occupation and not upon birth. Those who acquired knowledge and taught it to others were known as Brāhmaṇas. Those who took to the occupation of fighting against enemies

were called the Kṣatriyas. The tradesmen, agriculturists and others were the Vaiśyas. The class of *śūdras* came into existence sometime later. In many places in the *Ṛgveda*, only three classes are mentioned. It is only in one verse in the *Puruṣa-sūkta*, that there is a reference to the class of *śūdras* According to D. R. Bhandarkar, the word *śūdra* originally meant a foreigner or a non-Aryan. "There can be no doubt," he says, "that *śūdras* denoted foreigners or aboriginals, who were different from Aryas in stock and religion."[1] There were only three Varṇas or classes amongst the Aryans : the fourth Varṇa was included later on. Those of the non-Aryans, who were conquered in war were made the *śūdras*. It is most probably to these *śūdras*, that reference is made in the *Puruṣa sūkta* of *Ṛgveda* and in other *Saṁhitās*. There are a number of verses in *Atharvaveda* in which the classes of Aryas and *śūdras* have been contrasted, as for instance in the verse XIX, 62,1 : "Make me beloved among the Gods, (wise ones), beloved among the princes. May I be dear to everyone, who sees me, whether *śūdra* or Arya."

Dr. Muir expresses the view that with the increase of population among the Aryan tribes, the principle of division of labour was established among them. "The more thoughtful and contemplative class has now devoted itself to the worship of the gods, the more enterprising and warlike members of the community have assumed authority over the rest,

1. *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture*, p. 10.

the great mass of people follow the occupations of trade and husbandry, while gradually increasing number of the adjoining barbarians is becoming incorporated in the growing society as slaves or handicraftsmen of the lowest description."[1]

It is of course true that in ancient times, the Brāhmaṇas were highly respected by people including the kings, on account of their intellectual and spiritual attainments. They were endowed with noble qualities and were naturally looked upon by the rest of the people as their leaders. Anybody who acquired a high degree of spiritual culture could be a Brāhmaṇa or a Ṛṣi in the good old Vedic times. There was no such rule in this period that the members of the same caste should pursue the same occupation. Max Müller says, "If then with all the documents before us we ask the question ; does caste as we find it in the Manu and at the present day, form part of the most ancient religious teaching of the Vedas, we can answer with a decided no. There is no authority whatsoever in the hymns of the Veda for the complicated system of caste ; no authority for the degraded position of *Śūdras*. There is no law to prohibit the different classes of the people from living together, from eating and drinking together, no law to prohibit the marriage of people belonging to different castes."[2]

There are many instances in the Vedic times, of Brāhmaṇas being recruited from all ranks of life.

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1. *Original Sanskrit Texts*, Vol. V, p. 452.
2. *Chips*, Vol. II, p. 311.

A. C. Das makes a mention of many such cases. A Kṣatriya clan is mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as becoming Brāhmaṇas. Viśvāmitra as already stated, though a Kṣatriya, became a Brāhmaṇa. Kavaṣa, the son of a slave girl was acknowledged a Ṛṣi by the other Ṛṣis of his times. Vasiṣṭha a most renowned sage is also said to have been born of a low class woman.

The same thing happened in the case of other classes as well. Nābhāga, a Kṣatriya to begin with, later on became a Vaiśya, Bhāradwāja, though born in a Brāhmaṇa family was adopted by the Kṣatriya king Bharata as his son.[1]

Originally the term Kṣatriya was used to designate persons of royal descent as well as the nobles and their families, but as we find in the *Ṛgveda*, it was not the Kṣatriyas alone, who fought against the enemies. the common people also fought along with them as is evident from many verses in the *Ṛgveda* (1, 69, 3. IV, 24,4. VI, 26, 1).

There was no ban whatsoever on inter-marriage among the different classes. A Brāhmaṇa could choose his spouse from any class and the same was true of the members of other classes. "On the whole it is difficult," says V. M. Apte, "not to agree with the views long ago propounded by Muir, that the Brāhmaṇas (for less the Kṣatriyas or the Vaiśyas) did not constitute an exclusive caste or race, and that the prerogatives of composing hymns and officiating at the services were not regarded, in the age of *Ṛgveda*, as

1. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

entirely confined to men of priestly families. The same thing was equally or perhaps more true of the minor professions. ...... The heredity of occupations was therefore not yet a recognised principle, far less an established fact. Of the other essential features of the caste system, *i.e.* prohibition of inter-dining and inter-marriage, no such restriction is even remotely hinted at in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*."[1]

There is no evidence in the *Ṛgveda* to show, that there was in that age any preferance for the *anuloma* from of marriage, in which a man of a higher class marries a woman of a lower class. Both forms of marriage *anuloma* as well as *pratiloma*, seem to be prevalent in the Vedic society, There are many instances of Ṛṣis or sages marrying the daughters of Kṣatriya kings. Kakṣīvaṇ for instance married the grand daughter of king Bhavya (*Ṛgveda* I, 126). Vimada, a Brāhmaṇa by profession wanted to marry a Rājanya princess, Kamadyu by name. But the aristocratic father would not consent to his daughter marrying a poor Brāhmaṇa. Upon this the two lovers eloped to an unknown place. Then the parents realised their mistake and gave their consent to the marriage of their daughter with that Brāhmaṇa youth. The references to this incident are found in *Ṛgveda* (I, 112, 19; 116, 1; 111, 20).

There are similarly many references to the *pratiloma* form of marriage in which a woman of a higher class marries a man of a lower class. Sasvatī,

1. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

the daughter of the Ṛṣi Aṅgiras was married to king Asaṅga (*Ṛgveda* VIII, 1,34). Yayāti a Kṣatriya prince married the daughter of sage Śukrācārya (RV. X, 63,1). Similarly king Svanya Bhāvayavya married his wife from a family of Brāhmaṇas.

Thus there is ample evidence to show, that inter-marriage was common among the various classes of Aryans in the Vedic period. There was a free mixing of sexes in those times. Women did not live in seclusion, and could freely choose their life partners, with the minimum interference from the elders of the family. Such a condition of society is naturally bound to lead to inter-marriages as is the case among many western nations at the present time.

Society as it is presented to us in the Vedas, consists of free men, engaged in various pursuits of life, and enjoying equal status, excepting of course the *śūdras*, who were the conquered people, reduced to subjection and serfdom. Coming as they did, from the erstwhile hostile non-Aryan tribes, they could not be elevated to a position of equality and intimacy with the Aryans. These people became servants in the households of the higher classes, or they were allotted tasks which required manual labour ; but there was no question, in that period, of regarding any of them as untouchables. In the Vedic age, we have not the slightest trace of the institution of untouchability, which came into vogue at a much later time.

There were two props of caste system, as it came to exist after the Vedic period; the principle of

heredity and the ban on inter-marriage. Both of them were absent from the society of Vedic times.

A Note on Caste System

How did the caste system, as we find it to-day among the Hindus, take its rise ?

In all old societies, it was customary for the sons to generally follow the professions of their fathers. From a very early age, the son would begin learning the handicraft from his father, who thus trained him for his future vocation of life. There were no public institutions, where a boy could receive instruction in a particular craft. Learning took place in the family and this generally went on from generation to generation. This was as true in the western countries as in the eastern. This system continued in the west more or less right up to the beginning of the period of industrial revolution. In western countries, however, much before this period the mercantile class began to make a head-way, and by the time, the era of industrial revolution was ushered in, it had gained considerable prestige and importance. No such thing happened in India. The Vaiśya or the mercantile class of India continued, specially in the post-vedic period, to hold an inferior position as compared to the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas. In the west again the labouring classes, in course of time, learned to organise themselves into trade unions, and there by, to match their united strength against that of the employers. The labourers in the west have thus gradually risen in social scale. The spread of education among all classes led further

to the growth of the spirit of equality among the artisans and the workers. There was no such development in India till very recent times.

There is however a difference which needs to be accounted for. We do not find anywhere else, the rigidity of caste system as we find in India. There is no doubt, that at some time or other, professions were, in most countries, hereditary. We have it on a reliable authority[1] that in Mexico no one could engage in any trade except by right of inheritance or by public permission. Similarly in Peru, the occupations as well as every other calling and office always descended from father to son. "The division of castes was in this particular as precise as that which existed in Hindustan or in Egypt." Similarly in most countries for one reason or another, inter-marriage between different classes was not allowed. In ancient Rome for instance, the Plebians could not inter-marry with the Patricians. In Guetamala in South America it was a rule, that if any scion of a noble family married a Plebian women, he was reduced to the caste of the Plebian, and his property was confiscated by the king. Almost all nations have at one time or another opposed the idea of any person having marital relations with strangers and foreigners. "All nations have oppressed industrially and politically the races whom they conquered. In one sense slavery may be called the lowest of the castes, because in most of its actual forms it does permit some small customary rights to

1. See article on caste in *Encyclopaedia Britanica.*

the slave."[1] This is what happened with the *Śūdras*, who as we have found, consisted mostly of the conquered peoples.

In India, however, the caste system has persisted right upto modern times. One chief reason, why the system has had a prolonged life in India is, that for a number of centuries, the country remained under foreign subjection, deprived of the power to make laws according to the changing needs of the times. But this alone is not enough to explain the ubiquitousness and deep-rootedness of caste system in Hindu society. The present writer believes that the caste system originally came into being in the form of a separate priestly class. It seems to be a fact, that this class after a fairly prolonged period of conflict with the Kṣatriyas, alluded to in many places in the *Ṛgveda*[2] succeeded in gaining the position of superiority. Though Brāhmaṇas were not kings, they in a way became more powerful than the kings themselves. While in the *Upaniṣads*, there are many instances of Brāhmaṇas seeking instruction from Kṣatriya kings, a great change seems to have taken place by the time, the age of Manu and *Purāṇas* is reached. The Brāhmaṇas have now become powerful and the Kṣatriyas submissive to their acclesiastical authority, This is also what happened in Europe in the heyday of Roman Catholic Church. The Pope had the power to make and unmake kings and the clergy were the real force in the land. This went on

1. Article on castes in *Encyclopaedia Britanica*.
2. See Muir : *Original Sanskrit Texts*, Vol. III.

for centuries, till ultimately the states made themselves free from the stranglehold of the Church. There is, however, one main difference between the Hindu priestly class and the Christian clergy. The Catholic priests were not allowed to marry and thus they had no interest in making their profession hereditary. They, therefore, did not organise themselves into a separate caste. The Brāhmaṇas on the other hand founded families, and naturally wanted to leave their power and prestige to their children. In course of time they made themselves into a strong and exclusive caste. This took place most probably towards the last phase of the Vedic Age. Following the example of Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas formed the next important class, and the common people in course of time got divided into a number of subsidiary castes. The process once started had no ending, and thousands of sub-castes in all *Varṇas* came into existence.

(*B*) *The Position of Women*

The Aryan family

The Aryan family was a patriarchical family. The father exercised complete authority over all members of the household. His word was law. But the general atmosphere was that of love and affection, domestic happiness and conjugal affection are frequently alluded to in the *Ṛgveda*. The blessing given by the priest to the bride at the time of marriage brings out clearly the ideal of domestic joy, so dear to the heart of ancient Aryans.

"Happy be thou and prosper with thy children here. Use vigilance in ruling thy household, and closely unite thy body with this man thy lord. So shall ye full of years address the assembly (RV. X, 85, 27)."

In the house, the wife was the mistress of the household. "Over thy husband's father and over the husband's mother, thou art to be the *Sāmrāñjī* or the queen. Over the sister of thy lord and over his brothers thou art to hold sway (RV. X, 85, 46)."

The wife was the partner of her husband in all essential matters. She kept the sacrificial fire alight, and no sacrifice could be regarded as complete, unless the wife participated in it. There were no restriction on her movements. She could take part in the discussions of political assemblies, and attend all festive occasions, public tournaments and displays, without any restraint.

The wife is described in the *Ṛgveda* as loving and obedient to her husband, making herself look beautiful to please him (RV. IV, 3, 2, IV, 58, 9) and looking after his comforts with a smiling countenance. She is spoken of as the ornament of the house (RV. 1, 66, 3).

The children were held in great affection by the parents. Prayers are addressed for the birth of a male child in numerous Vedic verses (RV. III, 1, 23; X, 85, 25). The reason probably is that in those early days, the number of the Aryans was small, as compared to the non-Aryans, against whom they had to fight

on many an occasion. Sons were therefore ardently desired to serve as warriors and defenders of home and hearth.

The father had complete authority over his sons. He is depicted as ordinarily loving and affectionate towards the son, anxious to give him the best education. He was occasionally harsh to him but it was only in the interest of discipline. The son looked upon his father with great reverence and was very much devoted to him. He held it as his duty to obey the father and respect him.

But the parents were no less affectionate towards the daughter. She even became the pet of the family on account of her sweet temper and loving manners. It was the desire of parents in the Vedic age to reach the full length of life with sons and daughters, *putrinā tā kumāriṇā* (RV. VIII, 31, 8).

The benefits of education were equally open to boys and girls. The girls were taught language and literature, fine arts and even military science. There are to be met with, a large number of the names of women, who were the seers of Vedic mantras. There were women Ṛṣis like Apālā, Ghōṣā, Lopāmudrā, Mamatā, Yamī, Viśvavārā and many others. There are also on record the names of many women, who had been given military training. The name of Mudgalānī has already been mentioned in this respect. When some robbers drove away the cows of her husband, she went in pursuit of them, properly armed

and got all her cattle back from them. Dancing, music and some other fine arts were specially cultivated by women, and some writers like Koegi even suggest, that mixed dancing was also a common feature of *Ṛgvedic* times.

Educated youngmen sought, in marriage, young women who had been properly educated. Says a Vedic verse, "A young daughter, who has finished her education should be married to a youngman who is learned like her (YV. VIII, 1). The same idea is found in *Ṛgveda* III, 55, 16.

Freedom of Movement

The maid enjoyed great freedom. There was no restriction on her movements. She could attend all festive occasions and tournaments *(samanas)*, gaily dressed and with a smiling countenance (RV. I, 48, 6. IV 58, 8. X, 86, 10). These *samanas* exercised a great fascination on all young people. In the day-time there were held horse and chariot races and at night under the blazing torch light, all sorts of displays and theatrical performances were arranged.

The young people eagerly awaited the holding of these *samanas*. They provided an occasion for the lovers to woo each other. Many young men selected their future wives on these occasions (RV. VII 2, 5); and so they flocked to them in large number. There is not the slightest doubt, that women in old vedic times had perfect freedom to select their life partners. It was a recognised custom of that age, and the

mothers encouraged their daughters to choose their life companions for themselves. They even decorated their daughters, when they went to attend the *samanas*. Thus the worry of the parents was greatly lessened, but the marriage could take place only with their consent. The mature advice of the parents played an important part in the final selection of the bride-groom. But the initiative had always to come from the girl herself. It was on rare occasions that the parents thought it proper to negative the choice of their daughter. There are instances in the *Ṛgveda* of the elopement of lovers, when the consent of the parents was not forthcoming (RV. I, 112. 19. V, 39, 7). A very interesting example, in which the parents withheld their consent, occurs in case of Śyāvāśva, the son of a priest, who ardently loved a princess, who also loved him in return and wanted to marry him. But the queen vetoed the proposal and prevented the marriage from taking place (RV. VIII, 35, 38). Parents sometimes invited the suitors of their daughters to their homes, in order to see for themselves their eligibility for marriage (AV. VI, 61, 1). Ultimately the choice was always to be made by the maiden herself. The parents could not force their choice upon her, though they could put forward their objections to a particular choice of their daughter. A healthy compromise was thus affected between the impetuous ardour of youth and the mature wisdom of age.

Age of Marriage

It follows from the above description that marri-

age in the Vedic age always took place at a grown up age. "It is significant," says B. S. Upādhyāya, "that there is not a single reference to child marriage in the whole of *Ṛgveda Saṁhitā*. The maiden was more than conscious of the love she was making, and the bride was perfectly aware of the rituals, shewas a witness to."[1]

It was not compulsory for a maiden to marry, unless she found a man after her own heart. There are instances in the Veda of unmarried women growing old in their father's house (RV. X, 39, 3. AV. 1, 14, 3). No stigma was attached to the state of spinsterhood. It was thought better to remain a life-long spinster than to marry a man without love.

There are many references to the courtship of young women by their lovers, to the gifts bestowed by them to their sweethearts, and to the mutual love between the youth and the maid (RV. 1, 115, 2. I, 117, 18. I, 167, 3). All this could only happen when marriages took place at grown up age.

Woman's right to Property

The childless widow had a right to her husband's property (RV. V, 102, 11). The unmarried daughter not only had a right of maintenance in her father's house, but she also got a share of ancestral property, if she chose to remain a spinster all her life. A life-long spinster however was not regarded as a desirable member of the household both on economic as well as moral grounds.

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1. *Women in Rigveda*, p. 130 etc.

There is, however, no evidence whatsoever to show, that a woman after her marriage had any share in her father's property or that she could have a share in the property of her husband, if she survived him. It appears that the Aryan woman had not much of a legal status, but she enjoyed so great a respect in the household, that she had no cause to complain against this legal drawback. In fact, she was the central figure in the family. The husband loved her and the children held her in great respect. The social adjustment was so perfect, that the legal aspect of the question never troubled anybody. In actual practice, she was the mistress and queen of the household. In domestic matters, her word was law, and her participation in all important functions was essential. No sacrifice was regarded as complete without her presence, and in her capacity as the *Gṛhapatnī*, as B. S. Upādhyāya says, "She had the charge of the entire household, of the members of the family, the domestics and slaves, and of cattle and other animals."[1] She looked after each detail of the household, and was the source of domestic harmony. Certain traditions grew up around the Indian woman in the Vedic period, which, law or no law; gave a very elevated and dignified position to her.

The husband, of course, was the complete master of his wife's person. He could do whatever he liked with her. But in practice she reigned supreme in her husband's home, and her authority was seldom

1. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

questioned. Society however is a complex affair, and it would not be a matter of surprise, if here and there cases of mal-treatment of women actually occured. In the whole *Ṛgveda* there is only one hymn known as the gambler's hymn, in which the wife is actually staked and lost, though she is recovered by the husband later, along with the rest of his property. In the light of the highest regard and honour shown to women in numerous places in the Vedic texts, the above solitary instance can only be regarded as an exception, and should not be taken by any means as a pointer to the usual state of things in the Vedic society. The usual thing was, that a woman was regarded as an ornament of the house, an object of love to her husband and of reverence to her children. She held an honoured position both at home and in society at large, and felt quite happy and contented.

Widow Re-Marriage

As girls were married at a grown up age, the number of widows was not large in the Vedic age. There are occasional references to widows in the *Ṛgveda*, but there is no evidence to show, that there was any regular custom of widow re-marriage in that period. It is however clearly indicated, that after the death of her husband, the widow was almost always re-married to the younger brother of the dead husband or to another kinsman who stood in the relation of a younger brother to him. This is borne out by the funeral hymn of the *Ṛgveda* X, 18. When the dead body was carried to the funeral pyre, the widow

accompanied the bier and according to custom had to lie down by the side of the dead husband. She was then asked to get up in the following words, "Rise, come into the world of life, O woman, as he by whose side thou art lying has no life in him." It was then proclaimed that she would be the wife of the younger brother of her dead husband. It seems that no regular nuptial ceremony was performed on this occasion. It was considered enough to make her the wife of his former brother-in-law, when he took her by the hand in the presence of all assembled people. The remarriage of the widow to her brother-in-law is referred to again in *Ṛgveda* X, 40, 2 in the following lines. "Where are ye Aśvins, in the evening, where are ye in the morn and where rest ye in the night. Who brings ye home, as the widow to bed draws her husband's brother, or as the bride attracts the groom." The evidence seems to be conclusive that there prevailed in the Vedic society the custom, according to which the younger brother could marry the widow of his dead brother.

It can be presumed from the conditions of the times, in which the Aryans lived, that a widow of child-bearing age could not be allowed to remain unmarried even for a short period. The number of Aryans was not large, and they were living in the midst of the hordes of non-Aryans. Conflict was the order of the day, in which, naturally, many combatants on both sides lost their lives. So we have prayers in the Vedas for the birth of heroic sons in a large

number. We therefore cannot expect the society of that age to look with favour on young widows remaining unmarried for any length of time. In *Atharaveda* IX, 5, 28 there is an allusion to such remarried widows, who are called *Punarbhu i.e.* born again or rejuvenated. Even those women, whose husbands had disappeared and remained untraced for a certain period, were regarded as equivalent to widows and were allowed to be married again.

For the same reason, a widow could not be allowed to burn herself on the pyre of her dead husband. There is no mention of *satī* in the *Ṛigveda.* According to some writers, the custom might have been prevalent in very primitive times. There is a reference to this early custom in *Atharvaveda* XVIII, 3, 1. This perhaps explains the ritual, according to which the widow had to lie down beside her dead husband on the funeral pyre and was then asked to rise up. It however seems to be a fact that in the Vedic age there did not prevail the custom of *satī.*

According to the evidence of anthropology, the custom of burning the wives of a dead chief was widely prevalent in very old times, but this could only have been in remote antiquity, before the *Ṛgvedic* civilisation came into being. As already stated, there is no allusion to this custom anywhere in the *Ṛgveda,* while the *Atharvaveda* speaks disparagingly of it (XVIII, 3, 1).

Motherhood was looked upon as the most important characteristic of a woman in Vedic times. To be a

mother was held a great honour. The chief object of marriage was the procreation of children, so that the race could be perpetuated. If a husband happened to be physically unfit, or if he was absent for a long period, the woman could raise progeny with another man, with the sanction of society.

There are frequent references in the *Ṛgveda* to this practice, which later came to be known as *niyoga* or lavirate (RV. I, 116, 13; VI, 62, 7; X, 39, 7). Thus Purandhrī Vadhrimatī obtained a son during the impotence of her husband. The Pāṇḍavas are described in *Mahābhārata* as having been born of *niyoga*, and there are other instances also.

Social usages arise in response to the needs of particular times. They continue as long as the original conditions, which gave them birth, remain. Sometimes they survive the period of their utility; but living and free societies, sooner or later, discard them in favour of more useful institutions. It is only when people lose their liberty, and the power of making laws is taken away from them, that social customs which are no longer useful, remain alive and operative.

It would however be a mistake to judge the customs of an earlier epoch by the standards of a later age. The custom of *niyoga* was discontinued by the later-day Hindu society; but it remained as long as it served the needs of society under those particular circumstances. It was then a socially-recognised form of sexual union, and was therefore quite a respectable thing.

Monogamy

Marriages were generally monogamous, though polygamy also existed. It was however not at all common. Excepting a few influential and well to do Kṣatriyas and Brāhmaṇas, who occasionally had recourse to polygamy, the overwhelmingly large number of people practised monogamy. Some scholars hold the view, that the Aryans were originally a monogamous people, and adopted polygamy, when they came into contact with the aboriginal non-Aryans; among whom the custom prevailed. It is a fact, that many non-Aryan customs were gradually incorporated into the social fabric of the Aryans, and the custom of marrying more wives than one might have been one of them. There are however references to polygamy in the *Ṛgveda*, but they are generally with regard to rich and aristocratic nobles or influential Brāhmaṇas. In a verse in *Ṛgveda*, an interesting simile is drawn from the pitiable condition of a man who is married to more than one wife: "Like co-wives on every side, my ribs press painfully on me all around." (I, 105, 8). But the references to monogamy are so numerous, that it becomes clear, that monogamy was the rule, and polygamy an exception in Aryan society.

We find a lamentable feature in the last phase of the Vedic period, in the form of a custom of slave girls being given away to the husbands along with the brides. The slave girls could be treated as *vadhūs* or wives, whenever the husband wanted to give them

that status. It is also a fact that the kings used to present to the priests slave girls, along with cows, horses and gold. Naturally the custom was confind to rich and well-to-do people only, among the higher classes.

Standard of Purity

There are allusions to conjugal infidelity and sex immorality in a number of verses in the *Ṛgveda* (X, 34,4; II, 29, 1; X, 40,6). Women are also spoken of as ungovernable and fickle (RV. VIII, 33, 17; X, 95 15). But these remarks are not to be taken as of general applicability, as in every society, there are lapses from the normal standard. The standard of sex morality among the Aryans was high. The married couples were expected to be faithful to one another. "Adultery was generally regarded among Aryan people as a serious offence against the husband of the woman affected. We accordingly find in the legal literature of India traces of the rule, that an adulterer can be slain with impunity, if taken in the act." (Leist). Indian history presents us with numerous examples of women of great nobility, who were embodiments of virtue and were highly respected and honoured by all people.



CHAPTER IV

Moral Life of the People

Man, even at the primitive level, has an aptitude for distinguishing between right and wrong. The knowledge of what is considered right, is generally accompanied by the sense of moral obligation, or a sort of inner complusion to do the right. Morally right actions have a narrower field than merely right actions. It is right for a person to promote his physical health or to advance his mental culture. A morally right action however has a social reference, and takes account of its effect on social welfare. Man is not so completely adjusted to society as an ant or a bee. His selfish propensities, many a time, make him subordinate the good of society to what he considers to be his personal good. The natural impulses sometimes prove too strong to adjust themselves with the social requirements. All societies therefore have a moral code, which is binding upon all individual members. In his saner moments, an individual thoroughly appreciates the value of the moral code,

and condemns himself, if he violates, it is the heat of the moment. It is generally known as the voice of conscience.

One can get an idea of the level of culture of a particular community from its moral conceptions or its ideas of right and wrong. We may not be able to learn from the *saṁhitās* the ethical theory or theories held by ancient Aryans ; but we can get a more or less comprehensive insight into their moral life from numerous references scattered throughout the *saṁhitās*. Ethical science naturally comes later, but the moral code is there from the very beginning. It serves as a cementing factor and prevents society from disintegrating.

Truthfulness

The virtue which seems to make a great appeal to the Aryan mind is that of truthfulness. Untruth is condemned (RV. VI, 5, 5) and a liar is said to receive punishment from the gods (RV. 1, 152,1; VII,49,3; VII, 84, 2). The virtue of truthfulness was an object of the highest praise throughout the Vedic period and even afterwards. Rāma, Hariścandra, Yudhiṣṭhira are all of them the heroes of this period, and truth, as we are told in the great epics, was a deeply-cherished value in their lives. They are represented as making great sacrifices for what they regarded to be right and true.

Freedom from a life of Sin

We come across many prayers for a righteous life

and for being saved from sin. There are some beautiful verses in a hymn of *Ṛgveda* in which the poet implores forgiveness for his sins. "What great sin is it, Varuṇa, for which thou seekest to destroy thy worshipper and friend? Tell me, O unassailable and self-dependent God Freed from sin I shall speedily come to thee with adoration. It was not our will, O Varuṇa, but some seduction, which led us astray, —wine, anger, dice or thoughtlessness. The stronger perverts the weaker and even sleep occasions sin (RV. VII. 86)." We find from these verses, that gambling, drinking, anger and thoughtless behaviour were condemned as bad and sinful. In other places, disloyalty to a friend, a neighbour or a comrade is described as a sin (RV. V, 85, 7).

Sin was also connected with violation of *ṛta* or *dharma*. All things and beings were supposed to follow a prescribed course of nature. "This course is based upon the actual nature and constitution of the existing world, through which the sun rises daily, the seasons return, and each individual part performs its own function." The idea of *ṛta* also refers to the belief in the unalterable connection between conduct and its consequences. A good conduct inevitably leads to good consequences while bad effects flow from bad actions. This conception of *ṛta* was the earliest germ of the theory of *karma* which has played a very important part in Hindu view of life.

Love and Friendliness

In *Atharvaveda*, III, 31, we have a beautiful exhortation for a life of love and harmony. Some of the verses of this hymn are as follows :—

> Freedom from hatred I bring to you, and harmony, with unity of hearts.
> Love one another as the cow loveth the calf that she hath borne.
> May the son be of one mind with his mother and obedient to his father.
> Let the wife calm and gentle, speak words sweet as honey to her husband.
> Let no brother hate his brother, no sister to sister be unkind.
> United, with one intent, speak ye to one another your speech in friendliness.
> Intelligent, submissive, rest united, friendly and kind, bearing the yoke together.
> Come speakidg sweetly each one to the other.
> I make you one-intentioned and one-minded.

There is a well known verse in the 40th Chapter of *Yajurveda* which gives a metaphysical reason for the attitude of love for all creatures. "Whoever beholds all living creatures as in Him and Him the universal spirit as in all, henceforth regards no creature with contempt." The recognition of the presence of one universal spirit in all creatures should lead to love for all.

Here is a verse from *Yajurveda* on friendliness :—

"O strength-giver, bestow strength on me. May all beings regard me with the eye of a friend. May I regard all beings with the eye of a friend. With the eye of a friend may we regard one another (XXXVI, 18)." It is significant to note in this verse that in order to win the friendship of others, it is held necessary to be strong. Weakness seldom wins friendship.

A Liberal and Charitable Spirit

In *Ṛgveda* X, 117 the disposition to help the poor by means of gifts has been highly praised. The hymn has been beautifully translated in metrical form by J. Muir. Some verses are given below.[1] :—

1. The man endowed with ample pelf
   Who steels his heart in selfish mood
   Against the poor, who sue for food
   Shall no consoler find himself.
2. Relieve the poor while yet ye may
   Down future times long vista look
   And try to read that darkling book
   Your riches may soon flit away.
3. The man whose friend receives no share
   All his good, himself destroys
   Who thus alone his food enjoys
   His sin alone shall he bear.

Sweetness of Temper

In the following two verses we come across a prayer for the grant of a sweet and gentle temperament.

1. *Original Sanskrit Texts* Vol. V, pp. 432-33.

"Let me always speak sweet words. Let people love me when I look at them.

Endow me with light and inspiration so that I may overcome all enemies who create obstructions (AV. XII, 1, 58)."

"O my protecting Gods, bestow honey-like sweetness on me. Whatever word I utter among men, let be replete with persuasiveness (AV. VI, 69, 2)."

Power, Strength and Fearlessness

While these Vedic verses and many others extol truthfulness, benevolence, love and sweet temper, an equal emphasis is laid upon the qualities of strength and fearlessness and also on martial spirit. The ideal was an integrated life, and strength was regarded as important a part of it as the gentler virtues described about. The great Aryan heroes of ancient times illustrate all these virtues in their own persons. Men like Rama and Yudhiṣṭhira were truthful, gentle and affectionate and at the same time were endowed with martial qualities as well as great strength of body and mind. Some verses bearing upon these qualities are given below :—

"May the power manifested in the lion, the tiger, the adder, the burning fire, the sun and Brāhmaṇa, and the blessed goddess of energy, who endowed Indra with glory, come unto us conjoined with strength and vigour (AV. VI, 38, 1)."

"May we have no fear from friends, and no fear from enemies. Make us fearless in the day-time and

fearless at night. May we have no fear of what is known to us, and of what is not yet known. May all regions be replete with the spirit of friendliness for us (AV. XIX, 15, 6)."

"Thou art vigour, bestow vigour upon us; thou art strength, make us strong also. Thou hast no fear, grant unto us fearlessness. Thou art brilliance, endow us with brilliance too. Thine indignation falls upon evil and wickedness, grant us power to fight against unrighteousness. Thou art fortitude, grant us forbearance against pain and suffering (AV. VII, 89, 4)."

Martial Bravery

The ancient Aryans in their march towards the east and south of India had to do a lot of fighting against the hostile tribes. Martial qualities were greatly esteemed, and even the *ṛṣis* and sages prayed for warrior sons, who could protect the people against aggression, and vanquish all those who stood in the way of their expansion. The cultivation of martial spirit is as necessary in modern times as it was in good old days, in order to defend freedom against all possible attacks. The following is a free poetical rendering, by J. Muir,[1] of some verses of a remarkable hymn in the *Ṛgveda* (VI. 75) :—

When cased in mail, the warrior proud
Stalks on defiant to the front
To bear the raging battle's brunt
We seem to see a flashing cloud

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1. *Ibid.* Vol. V. p. 470.

Bold warrior, may thine armour bright
Preserve thee scatheless in the fight.

See yonder on the chariot stands
The dauntless charioteer, whose skill
His horses onwards drives, whose will
Their movements to and fro commands
The reins (their wondrous power extol)
Although behind, the steeds control.

The impetuous coursers shrilly neigh
As forward to the fight they rush
Their trampling hoofs, our foemen crush
They never shun the murderous fray.

Wisdom

Lastly, we find that wisdom or *buddhi* was held in great esteem in the Vedic period. Plato describes wisdom as one of the four cardinal virtues. No amount of courage or strength of self-discipline or a benevolent and friendly disposition can carry a man far, if it is associated with thoughtlessness. Wisdom is an essential virtue to guide the life of man along the right path. Courage and statesmanship are both necessary in a well-governed state. The ancient Aryans were brave people, but they equally admired resourcefulness and wisdom. It was most probably with the help of these virtues that they assimilated in course of time, all foreign elements, and spread their culture through the length and breadth of the country. The value, which the ancient seers and sages placed on *buddhi* or the power of thought is revealed in many Vedic verses. Here are some of them :—

O Agni, may we continue in austerities and
still more austerities.
May we always engage ourselves in studies.
May we live long and gain wisdom.
(AV. VII. 61, 2)

Do thou, O Agni, make me wise this day with
That wisdom, which is sought by gods and fathers
(YV. XXXII, 14)

Intelligence at eve, intelligence at morn
of day
With the Sun's beams, and by our speech
we gather
In us intelligence, wisdom,
(AV. VI, 108, 4; 5)

Such seems to be the conception of moral life in the Vedic times. It is difficult to be certain, whether their conception of benevolence embraced the whole humanity or only their own people. In the *Rgveda*, we come across verses calling upon Indra to bring whole-sale destruction upon the enemies. But the attitude towards enemies can not give any clue to the range of the quality of benevolence as conceived by any people. In the twentieth century, we find even the most civilized nations manufacturing most deadly weapons to annihilate their enemies but in sober moments, the wise people among all nations realise the kinship of all mankind, irrespective of their colour, creed or country. The verse from the 40th chapter of *Yajurveda*, which we have already quoted, undoubtedly points to the fact, that the wisest among

the Aryans had come to the realization of a common humanity in all mankind.

According to A. Barth, we can get an idea of the moral system of the Aryans from the conception which they formed of their gods. "The worshipper is required to be humble and sincere towards them, for they cannot be deceived, and they in their turn also do not deceive. How could it be permitted to men to be bad, when the gods are good, to be unjust, while they are just and to be deceitful, when they never deceive ? It is certainly a remarkable feature of the hymns, that they acknowledge no wicked divinities, and no mean and harmful practices."[1] His conclusion is, that "the hymns give evidence of an exalted and comprehensive morality, and that in striving to be without reproach before *Aditi* and the *Ādityas*, the Vedic ministrals feel the weight of other duties besides those of multiplying offerings to the gods and the punctilious observance of religious ritual."[2]

When we come to the period of Brāhmaṇas in the Vedic age, we come across for the first time with the doctrine of the *Ṛṇas* or debts. Each man from his very birth is heavily under obligation to society and the gods in many ways. It is therefore, the duty of man to pay off the debts which he owes to gods and his fellow-men. That life is to be regarded in the light of a duty and a responsibility is an important moral teaching of the Brāhmaṇas. We

1. *The Religions of India*, p. 33.
2. *Ibid.* p. 349.

owe debts to the gods, to our parents and ancestors, to learned persons and strangers and even to lower animals. Unless one pays off these debts, his life would be a life of sin. There is also in the Brāhmaṇas reference to a sacrifice known as *Sarvamedha*, in which the sacrificer gives away in charity every thing, he possesses, as a symbol of the complete fulfilment of his obligation or indebtedness.

Ethical doctrines do not comprise the main theme of the *Upaniṣads*. We, however find in them, here and there inculcation of virtues like truthfulness, self-restraint, dutifulness, compassion and non-attachment to things of the world. The whole drift of the teaching of *Upaniṣads* is towards the realization of the unity and sameness of life leading to the ethics of love and compassion.



CHAPTER V

Religion of the Ancient Aryans

The most widely prevalent view among the Indian and the Western scholars about Vedic religion is, that it consisted in the worship of natural forces, which came to be end owed, in course of time, with concrete personalities with various attributes. The awe-inspiring and sublime phenomena of nature profoundly impressed the Vedic Aryans, who deified them as gods and to whom they addressed their hymns of adoration, and their prayers for the good things of life. The most important and worshipful gods were Sūrya, Indra and Agni corresponding to the three regions of sky, air and earth. Varuna, Mitra, Pūṣan, Viṣṇu etc. were looked upon as diverse manifestations of Sūrya or the sun god, while Uṣas (dawn) and the two Aśvins (the two luminous points in the sky just preceding the dawn) were closely associated with it. Indra, the god of rain, was associated with Vāyu (wind) the Maruts (storm gods) and Rudra (the thunder god). Agni was god of the earth and therefore more easily accessible. On

Agni depended the life of man and other creatures, and the performance of sacrifice. It acted as an intermediary for carrying offerings to gods of the air and the sky. Later on Sūrya came to be regarded as a form of Agni.

The *Ṛgveda* (I, 34, 11 ; III, 6, 9,) gives the number of gods as thirty three divided into three groups of the Rudras, the Vasus and the Ādityas. Some other gods are also mentioned, which fall outside these thirty three gods.

Besides the gods associated with natural phenomena there are mentioned Aditi, Puruṣa, Prajāpati, Viśvakarman, Hiraṇya-garbha, each of whom is represented as the creator, or ruler of the universe.

Indra is the most popular of the gods, and the bulk of the prayers are addressed to him. Being the god of rain, he was the principal divinity of the Vedic Aryans. Next to Indra was Agni, who was the source of life in all living beings. The worship of other gods came next in order of importance.

The remarkable thing about the Vedic gods is, that they do not, like the gods of Greek mythology, form a graded hierarchy, each god having a fixed status, as higher or lower in relation to the other gods. Each god is alternately regarded as the highest and to this curious phenomenon Max Müller gives the name of Heno-theism or Kathenotheism. If each god is the highest or the supreme god, it means that in the eyes of at least the intelligent worshippers, it practically

stood for the ultimate reality. There cannot be more than one highest god. One is strongly tempted to assume, that though the common mass of worshippers might have continued to adore the various gods as distinct concrete living existences, who listend to their prayers and partook of their offerings, the wise ones among the Vedic Aryans, looked upon the gods as the diverse powers or manifestations of one supreme Being. This view is expressed in a number of places in the Vedas themselves. "Agni is That" says the "*Yajurveda*" Sun is that and Candramā is that, Śukra is that, Brahma is that and those waters and the Prajāpati" Griffith says that *Tad* or *That* in the *mantra* refers to the Supreme.

A still more explicit statement of this view is given in *Ṛgveda* 1, 115, 1: "They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, and Agni, and he is heavenly Garutmat. To what is one, sages give many a name; Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan". Griffith makes the following comment on this verse in his translation of *Ṛgveda*: "All these names, says the poet, are names of one and the same Divine being, the one supreme spirit under various manifestations."

It would not be quite right to say, that these ideas were confined to one or two or to only a few ancient ṛṣis. A poet generally gives expression to ideas, which are prevalent in his social environment or at least among the wise and intelligent members of his community. Even if he is the originator of an idea, he is most likely to test it out among his contempor-

aries before giving a poetical expression to it. There is always a social background to the ideas expressed in sacred or secular literature. Our difficulty is that we have no other means of knowing the social milieu of the Aryan sages and poets except the Vedas themselves. But there can be no doubt of the existence of this social milieu or background.

It is very difficult at such a distance of time to make an exact statement about the religion of the ancient Aryans. Many hymns give the impression that they were the worshippers of numerous gods and goddesses like Indra, Varuna, Agni, Sūrya etc., and yet we find one god being identified with another, or gods being invoked in groups of two or more, as if they possess only one personality among themselves. Again Varuṇa, Indra, Sūrya and Agni are described severally, as if each of them were the supreme power, the ruler and the sustaining force of the universe. Take for instance the following verses from *Atharvaveda*. After describing the Sūrya (Sun) as riding on the back of the sky and going towards the heavens, looking downwards, the poet speaks as follows. "He is the creator *(dhātā)* he the disposer, he the Vāyu and the clouds above. He is Aryaman, the Varuṅa, the Rudra, he the great god. He is Agni, he also the Sun, he indeed great Yama. (XIII, 4 4-5)"

The only reasonable inference, that can be drawn from the identification of one god with the others is that the poet looks upon all gods as identical and as the carriers of the same indwelling spirit. V.M.

Apte says, "*Ṛgvedic* mythology is dominated by two all-pervading figures; the Sun and the Fire. There are but few deities in the *Ṛgvedic* pantheon, that cannot be explained as manifestations of either the one or the other. Again the sun is regarded as a form of Agni (VII, 2, 1) and Agni is said to be born as the rising sun in the morning. This ultimate unity underlying the divine diversity may provide a solution of many a puzzle in *Ṛgvedic* mythology."[1]

It is sometimes said that the phenomenon of exalting each god to the highest rank, which we meet with in the Vedas, is due to the habit of the Vedic poets to indulge in exaggeration, when praising their gods. We can credit the Vedic poets with sufficient intelligence to realise, that if the gods were different from one another, the praising of one of them as the greatest and the most exalted would naturally rouse the wrath and jealousy of other gods, who would feel themselves humiliated by comparison. The so called exaggeration may therefore be due to the inward conviction of the worshipper, that all gods are essentially the same and so in praising one god one indirectly praises all the rest.

There is as yet no reliable chronological test, with which one may arrange the various Vedic hymns in the order in which they were composed, and then make a definite pronouncement that the earlier hymns teach polytheism, and that there is an advance from polytheism to monotheism, as we come to the later

1. *The Vedic Age*, p. 374.

hymns. Even those writers who hold the belief of the polytheistic character of the earlier hymns sometimes seem inclined to think, that the theistic point of view is implicitly present from the very beginning. "To our Aryan forefathers" says Monier Williams, "God's power was exhibited in the forces of nature even more evidently than to ouselves." He goes on to say, "Although innumerable gods and goddesses gifted with a thousand shapes now (*i. e.* in modern Hinduism) crowd the Hindu pantheon—it is probable that there existed for the first Aryan worshippers a simple theistic creed."[1]

There is one god Varuna, about whom it is definitely said, that he belongs to the earliest Vedic period, and yet there can be no better illustration of monotheism than the hymns addressed to him. He is described as upholding the phenomena of nature and controlling their order and movement. He sits on his throne in the highest heaven (RV. V. 67,1;2). His thousand spies travel in all dirctions and bring reports of the deeds of mankind (l.c. VII, 61, 3). He stretched out the heaven like a curtain ; he bears up the pillars of the earth (l.c. VIII, 42,1). The description given of Varuna and his moral grandeur in *Atharvaveda* (IV, 16) ;is so elevating, that the following poetical rendering of the hymn by J. Muir is worth quoting :—

> He, righteous Lord the sceptre wields
> Supreme, of universal sway
> His law, both men and gods obey

1. *Indian Wisdom*, p. 11.

To his decree, the highest yields.
He spread the Earth and watery waste
He reared the sky, and he bade the Sun
His shining circuit daily run
In him the worlds are all embraced.
The rivers flow at his behest
And yet, admire his wondrous skill
The ocean bed they cannot fill
Although their currents never rest.
This mighty lord, who rules us high
Though closely veiled from mortal gaze,
All men's most secret acts surveys
He ever free is ever nigh.
Two think, they are not over-heard
Who sit and plot as if alone
Their fancied secrets all are known
Unseen the God is there the third.[1]

Macdonnell speaks of the Vedic religious conception as "polytheistic monotheism," a contradictory assemblage of words; but he probably meant to convey by this phrase the idea, that the Vedic poets perceived a principle of unity beneath the apparent diversity of gods, who were, in reality, only the powers and manifestations of one supreme Deity.

Whatever one may say about some hymns of doubtful character, there are other hymns in which the monotheistic tendency is most clearly manifested, and admits of no doubt whatsoever. In *Ṛgveda* X. 81 and 82, Viśvakarman (*i,e.*, the maker of the world)

1. *Original Sanskrit Texts*, Vol. V, pp. 76 a, 76 b.

is described as the one all-seeing god, who has on every side eyes, faces, arms and feet, who is the father, creator, disposer, who knows all words, gives the gods their names, and is beyond the comprehension of mortals.

The *Pūruṣa Sūkta* is a celebrated hymn in the *Ṛgveda* which clearly recognises the oneness of the deity. Here are some verses from the hymn.

"Puruṣa has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. On every side, enveloping the earth, he transcends it by a span of ten fingers, Puruṣa himself is this whole (universe), whatever has been and whatever shall be. He is also the Lord of immortality ; since through food he expands.

All existing things are a quarter of him, and that which is immortal in the sky is three quarters of him. With three quarters Puruṣa mounted upwards. A quarter of him was produced below. He then became diffused everywhere, among things animate and inanimate" (J. Muir's translation). The clause, "through food he expands" is rather obscure. It may mean, that things of the world grow and expand, and since he is the lord of all, he seems to expand by the expansion of his manifestations. The word food ie often used in the sense of matter.

Here are two verses from *Atharvaveda* with a similar import.

"Homage be to that great Brahman, whose foot is the earth, and atmosphere the belly, who made the sky

his head. Whose eye is the sun, as well as the moon that grows new again; who made *Agni* his mouth. To that great Brahma be our homage."

"Of whom the wind was the outgoing and incoming breath, of whom the *Aṅgiras* were the eye, who made the various directions, the givers of knowledge or sound; to that great Brahma be our homage."

The 40th chapter of *Yajurveda* gives a beautiful expression to monotheistic faith. Some verses are given below :—

"There is only one being who exists
Unmoved, yet moving swifter than the mind
Who far outstrips the senses, though as gods
They strive to reach him; who himself at rest
Transcends the fleetest flight of other beings,
Who like the air supports all vital action.
He moves, yet moves not, he is far, yet near
He is within this universe, and yet outside this universe
Whoever beholds living creatures as in him, and him
The universal spirit as in all
Henceforth regards no creature with contempt."[1]

The following verses of *Ṛgveda*, X, 121, are worth quoting in this connection. The hymn speaks of *Hiraṇyagarbha* as the one sole lord of all that exists.

1. Monier Williams : *Indian Wisdom*, p. 38.

"Who made the earth and formed the skies,
Who giveth life, who giveth strength,
Whose bidding gods revere.
Who governs men and beasts, whose majesty
These snowy hills, this ocean with its rivers
Declare; of whom these spreading regions form
The arms, by whom the firmament is strong,
Earth firmly planted, the highest heavens
Supported, and the clouds that fill the air
Distributed and measured out; to whom
Both earth and heaven, established by his will
Look up with trembling mind; in whom revealed
The rising sun shines forth upon the world."[1]

There cannot be any more strongly-worded description of monotheism than the verses of *Atharva-veda*, XIII, 4, 14-21 :—

"Renown and glory, force and happiness, the Brahma's splendour, and food and nourishment to him who knoweth this God as one without a second, neither second, nor third, nor yet fourth is he called. He is called neither fifth, nor sixth, nor yet seventh. He is called neither eighth nor ninth nor is he the tenth.

He watcheth over creatures, those that breathe, and those that breathe not. He is the sole, the one alone. In him all gods become one."

There is not the slightest reason to doubt in the face of these quotations, that the Vedic sages had definitely attained the monotheistic point of view,

1. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

They perceived the principle of unity present in the diversity of objects in the world, and they gave various names to it.

But the question is; did the common people also, when they offered their prayers and offerings to the various gods, perceive their underlying unity. It is very difficult to be definite about it. We find a parallel case in modern Hinduism. It permits the worship of many gods and goddesses; but a Hindu of even an average culture knows, that the various gods are really the manifestations of the same one supreme Being. In worshipping a particular god he is really worshipping the supreme Power as manifested in that form. The cultured orthodox Hindus at least have no doubt on this point. The common uneducated people perhaps are content with the worship of separate gods and may not realise their oneness, or their common divine essence. If analogy can be of any help, the same might have been the state of mind of the ancient Aryan worshippers. While the wise people saw one supreme being manifested in various phenomena, as the source of their power and splendour, common people prayed to Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and other gods, regarding them as separate from one another, and without realising their inherent unity or identity. The difference, however, is that while the modern Hindu worships his gods by means of images, the ancient Aryan did so by means of prayers and sacrifices.

The Aryan Mode of Worship

It is almost universally agreed, that there was no

idol-worship in the Vedic times. There were no temples and no idols. "The religion of the Vedas" says Max Müller, "knows of no idols. The worship of idols in India is a secondary formation, a later degradation of the more primitive worship of ideal gods."[1] According to Keith also, there is "in the *Ṛgvedic* and the later period alike, absence of temple or house of the god even of the simplest kind."[2]

The Aryan mode of worship consisted of prayers and the daily performance of *Yajña* or sacrifice. The Vedic sacrifice in the beginning was a very simple affair with only one priest, and that the householder himself. The *Yajña* was performed everyday as an act of worship, and also on special occasions, such as the birth of a child, commencement of education, marriage and other important occasions of life. At these special sacrifices, the householder was generally assisted by a priest. Some sacrifices were seasonal in character and were celebrated at special periods. Now and then grand sacrifices were performed by wealthy people and by kings in particular, at which a fairly large number of priests officiated. These sacrifices usually continued for a number of days or even months. But the daily routine of *Yajña*, meant for everyday worship was very simple and did not probably take more than a few minutes in the morning as well as in the evening.

As regards the object of sacrifice, some writers,

1. *Chips from a German Workshop*, Vol. I, p. 38.
2. *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, Vol. I, p. 258.

like Keith, hold the view, that it was meant to propitiate the deity by means of gifts, as is generally done in the case of great and powerful human beings. It was so to speak a "give and take affair". The Agni, as an intermediary, carried the offerings to the god, who was strengthened as a consequence, and in his turn fulfilled the desires of the worshipper. Jevons, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the gift theory is essentially irreligious and from it no true religion could spring. All sacrifice is a means of drawing near the deity, to hold communion with him and to secure his favour and blessings.[1]

As is natural, the ideas which prompted the Aryans to perform sacrifices were of a diverse character. Some of them did so, to please the deity and thereby attain wealth, fame and other mundane objects of life as well as to obtain protection against their enemies ; but there were deeper ideas associated with the sacrifice as well. We have in the Vedas a clear statement, that the creation of the world was an act of sacrifice on the part of God or Puruṣa, so that the performance of *Yajña* came to be looked upon as a symbolic representation of the original sacrifice made by the creator himself.

The idea of sacrifice runs like a thread through all the speculations of ancient Aryans and gives a unifying shape to all their activities. The whole idea of religion, as pointed out by Jevons, is falsified if it

1. Jevons : *The Idea of God in Early Religions*, pp. 78 f.

is based merely on the principle of "give and take" in the material sense. What the Aryans really aimed at was the ideal of an integrated life, embodying all important values. The following verses of *Yajurveda*, XIV, 5 ; 29 ; give an idea of what was intended to be achieved through sacrifice :—

"May my truth and my faith, and my cattle and my wealth, and my goods and my pleasure, my play and my enjoyment, my children and future children, and my hymns and my pious acts prosper by sacrifice.

May my strength and my gain, and my thought and my mental power, and my praise and my fame, and my light and my heaven prosper by sacrifice.

May life grow through sacrifice, may *Prāṇa* thrive by sacrifice, may the eye, the ear, the mind and the *Ātman* thrive by sacrifice.........May light and knowledge (*Brahma*) thrive by sacrifice and may even sacrifice thrive by sacrifice."[1]

The worshipper prays in these verses for the attainment of both the material and spiritual blessings — for health, strength, riches, fame, and prosperity, as well as for truth, faith, mental and spiritual power and for a pious life.

We also find *Yajña* associated with the notion of *Ṛta* or the moral law governing universe. The *Yajña* or sacrifice, therefore, stood for all that was noble and good in the Aryan conception of life.

1. Griffith, Ralph T. H. : *The White Yajurveda* Translated, p. 162.

Sacrifice occupied a very important place in the life of the ancient Aryans. They were an eminently "sacrifice-loving people," performing sacrifices daily, seasonally and on all important occasions of life. From this, some writers, came to think, of course wrongly, that the Vedic hymns are subservient to the performance of sacrifice and were composed mainly for ritualistic purpose. The *Ṛgveda* as remarked by Macdonnell is a "book of psalms" full of emotional fervour and deep religious feeling. Some of the hymns of course appear to have been composed for use during sacrifices ; but most of them are meant for "independent prayer."

The offerings used in sacrifices in early *Ṛgvedic* period did not as a rule consist of the flesh of animals. "Very few indications of the animal offerings" says Potdar, "are to be come across in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*. We do not come across any clear reference that the animal offering was dear to any particular god. In the hymns, the offerings of *Ghṛta* (clarified butter) and *Soma* are very conspicuously referred to as brought or offered by the sacrificers. We do not come across any such reference to the *Paśu* or the beast of sacrifice, which should have occurred, if the beasts were commonly offered in the sacrifice."[1]

It becomes clear from the above description that the Vedic religion was not a religion of idolatory. There were in that period neither temples nor images ; but there existed an intimate personal rela-

1. *Sacrifice in the Ṛgveda*, p. 136.

tion between man and God. The Aryan worshipper cherished a deep faith for the deity. He prayed for the ordinary necessities of life as well as for higher and nobler things, and he had a deep conviction that his prayers would be heard. With this profound religious faith, he could stand against all difficulties, and take delight in the life of adventure and enterprise, and in the performance of pious and noble deeds.

The ancient Aryan was a deeply religious man. He offered prayers at morning and evening, along with the performance of simple *Yajña*. We have a number of references to this simple religion of the Aryans in ancient literature. When Sītā, the wife of Rāma was in captivity at Laṅkā, she is represented by Vālmīki, the author of *Rāmāyaṇa* as never missing her morning and evening prayers. The same is true of Rāma and other Aryan characters of this great epic. Though *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed at a later period the events which it narrates happened at a fairly early Vedic period. We can, therefore, to some extent get from it an idea of the religion, habits and customs of the early Aryans.

Here are given below some of the prayers offered by the ancient Aryans. They have been taken from a number of Vedic hymns :—

"O Indra, give strength to our bodies, strength to our offspring, that they may live. Thou alone art the giver of strength.

May be we fearless from friends and from those

who are not friendly to us, fearless from what is known, and also from what is not known, fearless at night and fearless in the day time. May all the directions be friendly to us.

O Agni, take us along the path of righteousness towards prosperity. Thou knowest the deeds of all. Keep away from us crooked sin. May we offer our homage to thee.

All powerful Indra, give us wisdom as father gives to his sons. Guide us in our way of life. May we attain illumination.

Make me immortal in that realm, where happiness, joys and felicities combine, and all longings are fulfilled.

O Lord, may we with our ears listen to what is good, and with our eyes see what is good. Thou holy one, with limbs and body firm, may we, singing thy glories, reach the term of life appointed by thyself.

May the Lord of thought and speech purify me. May Savitṛ purify me perfectly with his light-bestowing rays!

Save me, Lord, from unrighteousness. May I tread the path of goodness. Following in the footsteps of the immortals I have risen with a renewed life, with a good life before me.

I cannot know the right from the left, nor the East from the West. O Lord, inexperienced as I am, guided by thy wisdom, O bountious one, may I attain to light and fearlessness.

O Indra, bestow upon us the choicest of riches, ability and fortune, increase of wealth, soundness of body, sweetness of speech and fairness of days.

Through faith do we invoke God early in the morning, at midday and at the setting of the sun. O Lord, fill us with faith in thee."



CHAPTER VI

Philosophical Conceptions

Philosophy is an attempt on the part of man to understand the mystery of existence. It is a sign of mature thinking, and makes its appearance, when an individual is no longer satisfied with the uncritically accepted beliefs, current in his times, and wants to understand the nature of things in a rational manner. Philosophy is natural at a civilized stage, and we have plenty of evidence in the Vedas, that the sages and poets of the age were very much interested in some of the problems of Philosophy.

Doubt or scepticism is the precursor of philosophical reflection. Unless a thinker begins to doubt the validity of existing beliefs and practices, he would naturally have no urge to do his own thinking in regard to these basic matters. There are some hymns, in which the tendency towards scepticism is clearly marked. We read for instance in *Ṛgveda*, II, 12, 5 :—

"The terrible one of whom they ask 'where is he'

Or verily they say of him 'he is not'
He diminishes the goods of his enemy like a gambler the stakes of his opponents.
Put your faith in him; he, O men, is Indra."

It is clear from this verse, that some persons had begun to question the existence of Indra, and the poet exhorts the people to put their faith in him. An appeal to faith generally points to an under-current of disbelief or agnosticism, from which it is intended to bring the erring mortal back to the orthodox faith.

The same element of scepticism is present in the famous Creation hymn (RV. X, 129) :—

"Who truely knoweth! Who can here proclaim it!
Whence hither born, whence cometh this creation
... ...
Who knoweth then from whence it came to being
Whether it made itself or whether not
He who is its overseer in highest heavens
He surely knoweth, or perchance he knoweth not."

The poet propounds his own theory in some verses of this hymn but as is evident from the above lines, the note of uncertainty also finds an expression towards the end of the same hymn.

This hymn has been highly praised in all quarters, and therefore deserves to be reproduced more fully :—

"Nor being was there, nor non-being ; there was no atmosphere and no sky beyond. What covered all

and where, by what protected, was then a fathomless abyss of the waters ?

Neither death was there nor immortality ; there was not the sheen of night nor light of day. That One breathed without breath by inner power ; than it nothing truely whatever else existed besides.

Darkness there was, hidden by darkness. At the beginning, an unillumined ocean was this all. The living force which was enveloped in a shell, that one by the might of Tapas was born.

Desire arose in the beginning in *That* : it was the first seed of mind. The sages by devotion found the root of being in non-being, seeking it in their heart." and then follows the note of uncertainty alluded to above :—

"Who knoweth then from whence it came to being
Whether it made itself or whether not
He who is its overseer in highest heavens
He surely knoweth, or perchance
he knoweth not."[1]

Deussen remarks in praise of this hymn, "In its noble simplicity, in the loftiness of its philosophic vision, it is possibly the most admirable bit of philosophy of olden times." He says further that "No translation can ever do justice to the beauty of the original."

According to the view propounded here, there was neither being nor non-being in the beginning. By being, the sage understands the concrete existences

1. Bloomfield, M. : *The Religion of the Veda*, pp. 235-238.

of the world. These of course were non-existent in the beginning. He has himself made his meaning clear by stating that there was neither air nor sky, neither birth nor death, no perceptible sign to distinguish between light and darkness. In short there was complete absence of existence in all of its forms. Nor can it be said that the world has emerged out of non-being or nothing. There was an original principle, about which nothing positive can be stated excepting that it was the One from whom, at first water and then other existences took their rise.

It is undoubtedly a hymn of philosophical importance. We find here a gradual emergence of definite philosophical position, a conception of reality not to be identified with any of its manifestations.

There are many hymns in which the Vedic seers, after the manner of the earliest Greek thinkers regard the original substance of the world to be water, air, fire and so on.

In *Ṛgveda*, X, 121, we are told that water is the primordial element, from which other elements were gradually evolved. Water changed itself into a number of things, by means of an inherent power, to which in many places the name *Kāma* or cosmic desire is given. It is the creative urge, imbedded in the primordial substance itself. In these verses no attempt is made to explain how water itself came into existence. The poets of these verses were deeply impressed by the great powers of the waters and they did not feel any desire to push their enquiries beyond

water. This position is very much like that of the Greek philosopher Thales.

In *Ṛgveda*, X, 168, air is propounded as the original principle of terrestrial things. To the thinker of this hymn, as to the Greek philosopher, Anaxamenes *Vāyu* or air appeared to be more potent than water, on account of its presence everywhere. Its existence is made known to us by its thunder-like voice, and out of it all other elements take their rise. In *Atharvaveda*, XI, 6, *Vāyu* or air is replaced by *Prāṇa* or vital breath as the original principle and the Lord of all. *Prāṇa* is the symbol of life. Perhaps it would be nearer the poet's meaning, if we interpret *Vāyu* and *Prāṇa* as representing the life principle. What is *Prāṇa* in the case of living beings, is air in regard to the material things of the universe.

In *Ṛgveda*, X, 72, *Asat* is said to be the original source of the existents. *Asat* or non-existence does not mean, whenever it occurs in the Vedic verses, as equivalent to nothing, as the modern thinkers understand by this term. *Asat* is taken to mean the original indefinable principle from which the things of the world take their rise. That original principle is identified in the hymn with *Dakṣa*, or cosmic force and *Aditi* or Infinity. Max Müllar in his translation of the *Ṛgveda* has given it the meaning of infinite space, "the visible infinite, the endless expanse beyond the earth, beyond the clouds, beyond the sky."

The *Aghamarṣaṇa* hymn, RV. X, 85, propounds the conceptions of truth (*Satya*) and *Dharma* (*ṛta*), thereby giving an idea of the eternal order of things. We also find in this hymn, an account of the gradual evolution, of the Sun, the Moon and other worlds according to the cyclic law of creat ion. Here we also come across the philosophical concept of *Saṁvatsara* or the year, which developed into the full-fledged doctrine of time later on, in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*.

In these hymns, we have philosophical reflection in the real sense of the word, a real quest after the nature of the ultimate reality. But the sages of these hymns it seems, have confined themselves to discovering the physical substratum of the material world. Their stand-point is like that of a scientist, who does not go beyond the material realm in his search for an explanation of physical events. In *Ṛgveda*, I, 164, however, we have the source of all things, spoken of as boneless, which means formless or immaterial, from which all things have taken their rise. Similarly, in *Atharvaveda*, X, 7, 8 ; reference is made to *Skambha*, the supporter, who supports every thing without himself being supported. And then in the next hymn the word *Ātmā* makes its appearance. There are many other hymns in which the philosophical quest definitely leads to the positing of God or universal mind as the ultimate reality. We have already referred to the *Puruṣa sūkta*, and the *Hiranya-garbha sūkta* in

our account of the religion of the Vedic Aryans. These *Sūktas* besides carrying a note of religious fervour, are also philosophical in nature, in which an effort is made to apprehend the immanent unity in the midst of diversity. The reduction of the many to the one, the discovery of the principle of unity in the manifold things of the world is a sign of philosophical thought. And these hymns clearly indicate the tendency to simplify the complexity of observed happenings by the discernment of underlying unity.

But the most philosophical hymns in which the religious motive is absent, are the *Viśvakarman* hymns in the *Ṛgveda* X, 81 and 82. They begin by asking 'what was the wood, which the tree, out of which they fashioned heaven and earth.' The Ṛṣi of these *Sūktas* was not satisfied with stopping short at water or air or fire as the ultimate principle. While some thinkers did not ask themselves as to the origin of these first principles, this sage boldly pushes his enquiry beyond the physical element and arrives at the idea of God. "God existed before anything else had come into existence. He is one and only one (*eka eva*) and he brought the universe into being. He is that who is mighty in mind and supreme in power. He is the maker, the disposer, the most lofty presence. As father, He generated us, and as disposer, He knows the fate of all that is. It is from Him that water derived its being and received the motive power or the genera-

ting principle."[1] He is thus omni-present, omni-potent and omni-scient. He is invisible to the physical eye, but can be known by those, who reflect upon Him in their hearts.

This hymn is of great importance from a historical point of view. It provides, like many other hymns, the foundation for the basic ideas, which were later on formulated by the *Upaniṣadic* thinkers.

The Idea of Soul

The soul is correlated with *Prāṇa* or breath in *Ṛgveda* VII, 87, 2 ; X, 168, 4, most probably because *Prāṇa* is the chief indication or outer manifestation of soul or consciousness. The importance of *Prāṇa* is dwelt upon in many places, and in the older *Upaniṣads* there is a fable about the claims of each vital power in the body to superiority over the others. In order to settle the issue Prajāpati, to whom the matter is referred asks each of them to leave the body one after the other and see the result. Each power keeps out of the body for a year, and on coming back finds that though slightly inconvenienced, the body goes on living as before. When, however, the breath begins to depart, all the vital powers find to their consternation, that their life is intimately bound up with the breath and so they request it not to leave the body. The supremacy of *Prāṇa* is established beyond a doubt. It was thus natural to identify *Ātmā* with breath,

1. Barua, B. M.: *Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy*, pp. 37-38.

as both leave the body at the same time. The conception of *Ātma* as apart from God is clearly hinted at in the verse of RV. I, 164, 20, "Two birds associated together as friends inhabit the same tree. The one of them tastes the sweet fruit of the tree and the other looks on without enjoying." We find an echo of this mantra later on in the *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*, where it is stated that dwelling on the same tree with the supreme soul, the deluded individual soul, immersed in the world, is subjected to suffering, but when it perceives the supreme soul and His glory, its grief comes to an end.

The souls are spoken of as immortal and going to the land of Yama after death. Two separate path-ways, by which the creatures after their death travel to the other world, are mentioned as the pathway of the gods and the pathway of the fathers (RV. X, 88, 16). The conceptions of heaven and hell are also found. Good people go to heaven, while hell is a place of punishment for the evil doers.

We do not find any clear or detailed exposition of eschatalogical doctrine in the *Vedas*, nor do we come across any direct or explicit reference to the belief in rebirth or transmigration of souls. There is, however, a hymn in the *Ṛgveda*, in which the soul of the dying person is asked to come back to the land of the living from heaven, earth, the quarters, the sea, the sun, the dawn or the mountains, that is, from wheresoever it might have gone after death. This may be regarded as a germ of the idea of rebirth,

which is found in a full-fledged shape in the *Upaniṣads*. It seems that the ancient Aryans were more interested in the problems of living than in what happens to a person after death.

The Goal of Life

The Ancient Aryans had an optimistic outlook on life. They do not seem to have any great desire for the joys of heaven or for immortality. This world with its beauty and joy, fascinates them and they want to live in it as long as they can. They pray for a life of hundred years and even more. "Just a hundred years, indeed" says a Vedic Ṛṣi, "is that span, within which, O Gods, ye bring old age to our bodies, and our sons turn sires. Do not ye end our life in the midst of this course." They pray for strength for themselves and for their children and a healthy old age. They are lovers of all sorts of enjoyments and heartily pray for their attainment. They are equally lovers of domestic peace and joyfulness: "I, full of strength, enlightened and happy, come to thee, Home, rejoicing in my spirit; the home, on which the wanderer thinks and where cheerfulness and joy abide. I come to thee for safety and quiet. May joy be ours, felicity and blessing (*Yajurveda* III, 41-43)." Love of home is a characteristic which the Aryans have cherished from ancient times.

To the ancient Aryans, *Dharma* (virtue), *Artha* (wealth) and *Kāma* (pleasure) are the three objectives

of life. The term *Kāma* is used in the sense of physical needs, desires and enjoyments. "It bears witness to the fact, that a man eats and drinks, before he can live, and he must satisfy his sexual cravings, if he is to maintain the continuity of his species (Radhakrishnan)." *Kāma*, however, goes beyond physical needs. Man seeks all kinds of enjoyments and satisfactions. He needs recreation after he has done his day's work. There is beauty and joy all around us. They are divine gifts to humanity, and should be accepted in a mood of thankfulness.

To live a frustrated life was never the goal in the Vedic times. It is happiness which gives meaning to life and it should be regarded as the consummation of all life's activities. Goodness and unhappiness both go ill together. A good man should be a happy man also. Joy is thus the keynote of the ancient Indian culture. We read in *Sāmaveda* III, 4, 2, "May the spring be enjoyable indeed ; may the summer be enjoyable ; may the rains be enjoyable, and in their wake verily the autumn, the early winter and the late winter as well." The same yearning for happiness is repeated in *Ṛgveda* VII, 35, 8, "May the vast gazing sun rise up for our happiness ; may the four quarters be for our happiness ; may the standing mountains be for our happiness. May the rivers and the waters be for our happiness."

The attainment of physical satisfactions and other joys of life is not possible without *Artha* or wealth. Of course wealth cannot take the place of culture ;

but real culture will grow only when people have become free from the nightmare of poverty, unemployment and destitution.

The *Ṛgveda* is full of prayers for wealth, abundance of material comforts, heroic sons, victory and so on. "O Agni, grant us wealth, with heroic strength, most lofty very glorious, rich in offspring, free from disease and full of vigour (III, 16, 3)." In another verse a Ṛṣi prays to Indra for the grant of the choicest of riches and fortunes, increase of wealth, soundness of body, sweetness of speech and fairness of days. Such verses occur very frequently in the *Saṁhitās*.

But the Vedic Aryan is not satisfied with mere wealth and joys of life. He craves for *Dharma* also. Wealth earned by dishonest means has no charm for him, nor does he have any liking for an undisciplined life of pleasure. Unregulated pleasure generally leads to dissipation. In our relations with one another, we are to cultivate the virtues of truthfulness, love and mutual helpfulness. "Save me, God" says a Ṛṣi, "from unrighteousness. May I tread the path of goodness. Following the footsteps of the immortals, I have risen with a renewed life, with a good life before me. (*Yajurveda* IV, 28)."

There should be no antagonism, according to the Vedic conception of life, between a life of desires and the spiritual life. But the mistake comes in, when a man brings about a cleavage between the life of desire and that of the spirit. The life of even the greatest prosperity, as is so beautifully depicted in the

Kaṭha-Upaniṣad, must some day come to an end and dissolve into nothingness. The relation with the infinite must not be allowed to be broken on any account. In the life of the Aryans of the Vedic age, *Dharma* played a very important part. Life had no meaning for them without prayers, sacrifices and righteous living. The word *Dharma* was used both for moral qualities as well as for religious observances.



CHAPTER VII

Love of Nature & System of Education

The ancient Aryans were lovers of nature as well. There are many hymns which can be regarded as descriptions of the beautiful and sublime aspects of nature. They are the aesthetic reactions of Vedic poets to the magnificent phenomena of nature. The bright expanse of heaven, the broad sunlit earth with its green meadows, the luxurious vegetation and flowing rivers, the glorious sun, the beautiful dawn preceding sun-rise, the life giving waters, the cool breezes, the refreshing showers of rain, the bright fire, the dark mysterious night and incessantly flowing rivers made a deep impression on the minds of these poets and gave rise to a highly imaginative poetry which can compare with the best of its kind in the world. Here is a hymn addressed to 'night' (RV. X, 127) :—

"The goddess night arrives in all her glory
Looking about her with her countless eyes
She the immortal goddess throws her veil
Over low valley, rising ground and hill

But soon, with bright effulgence dispels
The darkness she produces, soon advancing
She calls her sister morning to return
And then each darksome shadow melts away
Kind goddess, be propitious to thy servant
Who at thy coming, straightway seeks repose
Like birds, who nightly nestle in the trees
Lo men and cattle, flocks and winged creatures
And even the ravenous hawks have gone to rest
Receive, O Night, dark daughter of the day
My hymn of praise which I present to thee
Like some rich offering to a conqueror."[1]

The following is the poetic response of a Vedic poet to the glorious spectacle of the sun after the passing away of night :—

"All seeing sun, the stars so bright
Which gleamed throughout the sombre night
Now scared like thieves slink fast away
Quenched by the splendour of thy ray
Thy beams to men thy presence show
Like blazing fires, they seem to glow
Conspicuous, rapid, source of light
Thou makest all the welkin bright
Thou stridest over the sky, thy rays
Create and measure out our days
Thy eye all living things surveys (RV. 1, 50)."[2]

The magnificent spectacles of nature inflamed the hearts of Vedic poets and evoked profound

1. Monier Williams : *Indian Wisdom*, p. 26.
2. J. Muir : *Original Sanskrit Texts*, Vol. V. p. 161.

religious emotions in them. Sometimes the poet begins with the emotional description of a natural phenomenon, and then all at once the religious mood takes hold of him and he begins praising and invoking the indwelling spirit of the phenomenon. Thus in many hymns, the aesthetic and religious motives are found intermixed.

Take the following enchanting hymn (RV. I. 48) to Uṣā or the resplendant dawn :—

"Hail, Uṣā, daughter of the sky
Who borne upon thy shining car
By ruddy steeds from realms afar
And ever lightening drawest nigh
Thou sweetly smilest goddess fair
Disclosing all thy youthful grace
Thy bosom bright, thy radiant face
And lustre of thy golden hair
So shines a fond and winning bride
Who robes her form in brilliant bright
And to her lord's admiring eyes
Displays her charm with conscious pride
But closely by the amorous sun
Pursued and vanquished in the race
Thou soon are locked in his embrace
And with him blendest into one
Fair Uṣā, though through years untold
Thou hast lived on, yet thou art born
Anew on each succeeding morn
And so thou art both young and old
Bright goddess, let thy genial rays
To us bring stores of envied wealth

In kine and steeds, and sons with health
And joy of heart and length of days."[1]

One can go on giving example after example of these rapturous strains, which remind one of the poems of many modern poets. These hymns are the rich imaginative outpourings of the Vedic poets at the sight of the sublime phenomena of nature.

If one were to read these poems aloud he would catch the emotional fervour and ecstasy, which the poet felt in his moments of communion with nature. At some places there is personification of a natural phenomenon ; but it is not to be always interpreted as a prayer addressed to a god. Poets personify nature in order to highten the artistic effect.

The System of Education

The Vedic civilization is a full-grown civilization. It represents a democratic society of free men and women, imbued with a dynamic spirit of enterprise, and moved by high ideals. In the *Ṛgveda*, we find not only the religious hymns or psalms sung in praise of the gods, "but also ballads, fragments of secular poetry and hymns conveying the highest philosophical speculation."[2] These hymns are written 'in perfect language and in elaborate metre' and speak to us about all aspects of the culture of those times.

The poetic compositions of so high an order, giving evidence of learning and knowledge, could

1. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

2. Mookerjee : *Hindu Civilization*, p. 83.

only be possible in a society, which had made adequate arrangements for imparting education to its youths, both boys and girls. Many of the hymns in the *Ṛgveda*, as already stated, are the compositions of lady-seers. The students received an all-round instruction in all subjects in vogue in those times. We get an idea of these subjects from the *Upaniṣads*, which represent the last phase of the Vedic age. The educational system in the *Upaniṣadic* period was mostly a continuation of the system as was current in the early Vedic period, with changes here and there made necessary by the passing of time. *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* (History and legends), *Gaṇita* and *Jyotiṣ* (Mathematics and Astronomy), *Vyākaraṇa* (Grammar), *Vākovākya* (Dialectics), *Tarka* (Logic), *Brahma-vidyā* (Religion and Philosophy), *Dhanur-vidyā* (Military Science), *Bhūta-vidyā* (Animal Science or Zoology) were some of the subjects taught to the young people.

A great emphasis was laid on the moral and physical training of students. They were taught to cultivate the virtues of truthfulness and goodness and to lead pure, austere and well-disciplined lives. The youths from rich and poor families were treated alike, and no distinction was made between them.

Education in the various arts and sciences was imparted by individual teachers in their *Āśramas*, where students from far and near assembled and sat at the feet of the *Ācārya*, leading a life of perfect obedience and consecration for a number of years.

There were found all over the country, many *Āśramas* of this type, presided over by learned teachers of high repute. The earlier education was most probably imparted to both boys and girls in their villages and towns, either by the parents themselves or by learned Brāhmaṇas of the locality.

The word *Brahmacārī* in the sense of a student of religion, occurs in a number of places in the *Ṛgveda*. In one of the verses of the *Ṛgveda* VII, 103, 5, we get an idea of how in those times the *Brahmacārīs* gathered about their teacher and how they imitated him in reciting the Vedic hymns.

The education of girls was not neglected, We come across many names of learned ladies in the Vedas, like Lopāmudrā, Apālā, Viśvavārā, and many others. There are plenty of indications that besides being trained in religious literature. the girls were given training in fine arts also, such as dancing, painting and music. Education, of course, was confined to higher classes.

In *Atharvaveda* XI, 5, we come across a description of the relations existing between a teacher and his pupils, and the ideal which the *Brahmacārīs* were taught to constantly keep before themselves. For instance, in verse 19 of the above hymn, we are told that by means of *Tapas* and *Brahmacarya* the gods and sages conquer death. "The fundamental educational method was *Tapas* or practice of penance and austerity as a process of self-realization (RV. X, 109, 4 ; 154, 2 ; 190, 1 ; 167, 1)."[1]

1. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The Vedic culture was thus a culture of plain living and high thinking. Life was simple, but thought ran high and embraced all eternity. The educational system was designed to achieve this great objective.

Importance of Saṁhitās

The Vedic *Saṁhitās* are an encyclopaedia of information about all aspects of the life of ancient Aryans. As there is no contemporary work of this period we have to depend mostly on these collections of hymns, for acquiring a knowledge of the religious, social, political, economic and ethical conceptions of the Vedic period. There has taken place a development in all directions since then. What was present in a seed-like condition in the *Saṁhitās*, assumed later on the form of a full-grown tree. We turn to *Caraka* and *Śuśruta* for medical information, and there were written in later times works on Astronomy, Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology as well as on Political Science and Economics. The philosophical and religious ideas contained in the *Vedas* receive their clearest formulation in the *Upaniṣads* and the later day *Darśanas*. We naturally turn to these remarkable treatises, whenever we want information on these subjects.

But there is one thing which we miss in all the later-day thought of India. We miss in it, the vigour and joyousness of life so characteristic of the people of the Vedic age. They were great people full of a

zest for life, fighting against their enemies and conquering them, and then pouring out their heartfelt gratitude in remarkable hymns of adoration. They loved the beauties of nature and were simply charmed by magnificent visions of the dawn and the night, the splendour of the sun, the phenomena of thunder, lightening and rain, and the enchanting light of the moon and the stars. They were not averse to the pleasures and good things of life. They prayed for a long and healthy life, for vigorous progeny, for cattle, horses and wealth in all forms. They were equally eager for knowledge and wisdom. They saw behind the phenomena of nature and consciousness, the presence of the cosmic law of righteousness or what they termed *Ṛta* or *Dharma.* They implicitly believed that victory finally belongs to truth and goodness. Some of the hymns to Varuṇa give expression to their deep moral fervour and their thirst for righteous living. They also developed remarkably modern-looking political and social institutions and were quite well-off economically. They had also educational institutions, which served most adequately the purpose of initiating the young people in the learning and knowledge of the times, and the high ideals of Aryan life.

Of course a large part of the Vedic literature is not intelligible at the present day. In fact many portions of the *Saṁhitās* had become obscure to the people of the age of the *Brāhmaṇas*, about eight or ten centuries before Christ, and so a need was felt even

then to provide commentary on the obscure portions of the *Vedas* in the form of *Nirukta* by Yāska. There are large portions in all the *Saṁhitās* specially in the *Yajur* and *Atharvaveda Saṁhitās*, which of course are intelligible, but do not make any appeal to us. They deal with rituals and other matters, which have no significance for the modern man, though they evoked great interest and enthusiasm in their own age. But there are many hymns in all the *Saṁhitās* which have a rich appeal for the modern man. They have great literary beauty and charm and possess a great value on account of their simplicity and the message of optimism, goodness and vigour which they convey.

It is highly important, that an anthology of all such hymns from all the *Saṁhitās* in beautiful translations is made available to the lovers of Vedic ideology. Any society or band of scholars, who accomplish this task will render a great service to the cause of Indian culture.



CHAPTER VIII

The Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads

The Brāhmaṇas

The *Brāhmaṇas* come next to the Vedic *Saṁhitās*. There is a gap of many centuries, during which there is no evidence that any literary work of importance was composed. The oldest *Brāhmaṇas* are said to have been composed at about 1000 B. C. They are prose compositions, very insipid and dry, except for the interesting legends, myths and narratives, which are found scattered throughout these books. They may be regarded as directories of rituals for the use of the priests. But as they were very diffuse and prolix, aphoristic rules, or what are known as *Śrauta Sūtras*, had to be prepared in order to provide brief summaries, for guidance at the time of sacrifices. Though they form an unpalatable reading, they are indispensable to the proper understanding of the science of sacrifice and the institution of priesthood, as a phase of religious development.

Sacrifice is the main theme of the *Brāhmaṇas*; everything else is subsidiary to it. The various legends and myths, which add an element of interest to the otherwise dry speculations of these texts, are mentioned by way of illustrations to explain knotty points in the sacrificial prescriptions. In the time of the *Brāhmaṇas*, sacrifices assumed a very great prominence and practically became the whole of religion. Even gods were given a secondary position. It came to be believed, that sacrifices performed according to prescribed rules, had magical effects, and could bring to the sacrificer or the *Yajamāna* the fulfilment of his desires on earth, and earn for him the merit of heavenly bliss after death. The meticulous and correct performance of each detail of the sacrifice was essential, if desired results were to follow.

In ancient Rome also, the priestly class tried to achieve ascendancy by the use of such-like means. "The rule, that no religious service can be acceptable to the gods unless it be performed without a flaw, was pushed to such an extent, that a single sacrifice had to be repeated thirty times in succession, on account of the mistakes again and again committed."[1] The same demand for accurate performance of sacrifices is found in the *Brāhmaṇas*.

The sacrifice in the *Brāhmaṇas* is no longer a means to an end, but it is an end in itself; indeed the highest aim of existence. 'The sacrifice is identical

1. Julias Eggeling, *S'atapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, Part I, Intro. p. X.

with Prajāpati, the Creator.' It is not only the act of sacrifice, which is endowed with magical power, "equally endowed with magic power and equally significant is everything which is connected with the sacrifice ; the sacrificial utensils no less than the prayers and formulae, the verses and their metres, the chants and their melodies. Every single sacrificial act is treated with the greatest circumstantiality. Enormous importance is attached to the most trivial circumstances, to the least details. Whether an action is to be performed to the left or to the right, whether a pot is to be put in this or that spot in the place of sacrifice, whether a blade of grass is to be laid down with the point to the north or to the north-east, whether the priest steps in front of the fire or behind it, in what direction he must have his face turned, into how many parts the sacrificial cake is to be divided, whether the ghee is to be poured into the Northern or the Southern half or into the centre of the fire, at which instant the repetition of a certain spell, the singing of a certain song has to take place ;—these are questions upon which generations of masters of the art of sacrifice have meditated, and which are treated in the most searching manner in the *Brāhmaṇas*. Upon the correct knowledge of all these details does the weal and woe of the sacrificer depend."[1]

It was only the Brāhmaṇas who know all these complicated details. As the people implicitly believed in the efficacy of sacrifice for the attainment of

1. Winternitz : *Indian Literature*, Vol. 1. pp. 197, 198.

their objectives on the earth, and the enjoyments of heaven after death, the Brāhmaṇa priests were looked upon with great awe and reverence, as the holders of the key to unlock the doors of terrestrial and heavenly treasures. The Brāhmaṇas thus came to possess a tremendous power on the rest of the people on account of the superstitious belief in the magical effects of sacrifices, which was a common feature of this age. They were regarded as equal to gods themselves. In the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* they are mentioned no longer merely as human gods by the side of the heavenly gods, they are described even as above the gods. And this was because of the knowledge of the art of sacrifice which the Brāhmaṇas possessed.

The contents of the *Brāhmaṇas* are usually divided into *vidhi* and *artha-vāda i.e.*, the rules of sacrifice and the explanation of the meaning and purpose of those rules respectively. An idea of the kind of explanation given for the various rites of sacrifice can be gathered from the following quotation from the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* :—

"He who is about to enter on the vow of abstinence, before the commencemt of the new-moon and half-moon sacrifice, touches water while standing between the two fires with his face turned towards the east. The *reason*, why he touches water is that man is impure on account of his speaking untruth, and because by that act (of touching water) an internal purification is affected, for water is indeed pure and this is the reason why he touches water."

It is a specimen of the kind of explanations with which the *Brāhmaṇas* abound. They have no interest for a modern reader, and unless a person is curious to understand the sacrificial phase of Indian religion, he would not have the patience to go through even a few pages of this arid and uninteresting literature.

There, however, accur in the *artha-vāda* or explanatory section of the *Brāhmaṇas,* what are known as *Itihāsas, Ākhyānas* and *Purāṇas,* i.e. narratives, myths and legends. They are brought in to explain some ritual or detail of sacrifice ; but they have their own importance as legends and myths, apart from their fancied connection with the act of sacrifice. There occurs in the *Śātapatha-Brāhmaṇa,* for instance the beautiful myth of *Purūravas* and *Urvaśī* which as a writer says is like an oasis in the desert. We also come across in the same *Brāhmaṇa,* the legend of the flood, which tells us how the whole human race was destroyed in the flood and was renewed through Manu, who alone survived. This legend bears some sort of resemblance with the legend of the flood as found in the Christian and other mythologies. In the Indian legend, we are told that Manu after the flood had subsided, offered a sacrifice, out of which a woman arose, who became the mother of the new human race. Thus this legend is also inserted to prove the greatness of sacrifice. The *Brāhmaṇas* are interspersed with many other legends and stories. There are, also, a number of creation

legends to be met with in the *Brāhmaṇas*, which give an idea of the cosmological views of their authors.

The *Brāhmaṇas* took up, as their special province the Vedic sacrifices and made them elaborate, costly and devoid of any religious significance, and sometimes even nauseating in detail, so that the common as well as the cultured people, in course of time, revolted against them and the noble edifice of Vedic religion came down with a crash, yielding place to new forms of religion, which we shall try to describe briefly in the next section.

Transition to the Upaniṣads

It would have been strange, if the entire class of educated people had been solely occupied with such barren discussions and fanciful speculations, as are found in the *Brāhmaṇas*. It, therefore, stands to reason that many people, not directly concerned with the sacrifices, such as the Kṣatriyas and even some of the Brāhmaṇas should have taken themselves to literary activities of a different type. "It is unthinkable," says Winternitz, "that the warriors and merchants, the farmers and herdsmen, the craftsmen and labourers should have sung no song and related no story... ... ... Moreover, the *Brāhmaṇas* pre-suppose the beginning of Grammar, Phonetics, Astronomy etc., i.e. of those sciences, which were later on pursued more independently as *Vedāṅgas*."[1] The philosophical speculations had already begun in the *Vedas*. These

1. *Ibid.* p. 226.

speculations underwent a profound development at the hands of the thinkers of *Upaniṣads*, who flourished during the later part of the *Brāhmaṇa* period.

We thus find that even when the priestly classes were busy in devising elaborate rules for sacrifices, there was a circle of thinkers and poets who had no interest in these sacrifices and who were devoted to lofty speculations, which found their expression later on in the *Upaniṣads*. Out of this circle arose the class of forest-hermits and wandering ascetics, who not only renounced the world and its pleasures, but also kept aloof from the sacrifices and ceremonies of Brāhmaṇa priests. Many sects were formed by these wandering ascetics. In one of the Buddhist works, more than sixty of these sects are referred to as existing at the time, when Buddha began his work of preaching.

The *Āraṇyakas* or forest-texts are attached to the *Brāhmaṇas* as appendices. They do not deal any longer with the rules and explanations of sacrificial ceremonies, but with the mystic meaning and symbolism of sacrifice. After the *Āśrama* system had been established, the *Āraṇyakas* served as reading texts for the people who adopted the *Vāna-prastha Āśrama*. The oldest *Upaniṣads* are either included in the *Āraṇyakas* or are appended to them as separate treatises. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Kena*, *Aitareya*, *Kauṣītaki*, *Taittirīya*, are such *Āraṇyopaniṣads*. Of these *Aitareya* and *Kauṣītaki* belong to the *Śākhās* of *Ṛgveda*, *Chāndogya* and *Kena* belong

to *Sāmaveda*, while *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Taittirīya* belong to white and black *Yajurveda* respectively. Some *Upaniṣads* such as *Īśa*, *Kaṭha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, *Maitrī* are incorporated in the *Śākhās* of white and black *Yajurveda*. They are known as *Saṁhitā-Upaniṣads*. Lastly there are the independent *Upaniṣads*, which are also regarded as authoritative, because they can be traced to some genuine Vedic *Śākhā* or school. Under this category occur the three independent *Upaniṣads* of the *Atharvaveda*, namely the *Muṇḍaka*, *Praśna* and *Māṇḍukīya Upaniṣads*. These are the thirteen well known and authoritative *Upaniṣads*.

The *Upaniṣads* are books of religion par excellence and contain the religious intuitions and philosophical reflections of the *Upaniṣadic* thinkers. The *Upaniṣads* can be regarded as the heirs of Vedic speculative tradition. They may be likened to a fresh breeze, which suddenly blows into a suffocating and stuffy region and purges it of all impurities and sickening odours. In the *Upaniṣads* the meaning of *Yajña* or sacrifice has been deepened and emphasis shifted from mere external observances to inner realisation, knowledge and contemplation take the place of elaborate sacrificial ritual, and in this search of truth, the laymen and the priests, the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas collaborate. The priestly classes in the Brāhmaṇas are depicted as arrogant and haughty. The Brāhmaṇa seekers of the ultimate reality in the *Upaniṣads*, on the other hand are very humble and earnest in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, and

show not the slightest hesitation in accepting decipleship under Kṣatriya kings. Throughout the *Upaniṣads* there is the atmosphere of academic dis-interestedness, humility, earnestness, and freshness of outlook.

The Main Teachings of Upaniṣads

The main topic of the *Upaniṣads* is the nature of the unseen reality which is said to pervade the entire universe and also to transcend it. It is held to be beyond the grasp of the senses and the mind. It can, therefore, be known only by intuitive perception. Inner contemplation and meditation are the means leading to spiritual realisation. When realisation takes place, all troubles come to an end, and a state of un-adulterated bliss supervenes. Such a person sees unity everywhere. All selves are like in his own self, and in substance identical. Seeing the same self everywhere, he hates none, and his compassion encompasses all creatures of the world.

The *Upaniṣads* may be looked upon as the books of an unremitting quest after truth. All the Ṛṣis and thinkers, who appear in the various *Upaniṣads*, seem to be fired with a zeal to understand the nature of the ultimate reality, by knowing which all doubts are dispelled, and truth revealed in its pure brilliance. The temper throughout is scientific and undogmatic. The spiritual aspirants, whether Brāhmaṇas or Kṣatriyas knock at every door, where they are likely to get satisfactory answers to their questions. The whole atmosphere seems to be

surcharged with a spirit of questioning and unsullied pursuit of truth. It is, therefore, understandable that even after so many centuries, the *Upaniṣads* are as fresh as ever, a perennial fountain-head of religious inspiration. Dārāshikoh, the son of Emperor Shāh Jahān was so much impressed by them, that he got them translated into Persian. Scheupenheur, the German philosopher speaks of them, "It is the most satisfying and elevating reading which is possible in this world. It has been the solace of my life and will be the solace of my death". According to him the fundamental doctrine of *Upaniṣads* is the doctrine of Unity, i.e. the doctrine, "that all plurality is only apparant, that in all individuals of this world, in whatever endless number, they may present themselves after and beside one-another, yet only one and the same truly existing being present and identical in them all manifests itself". So much was he enamoured of the *Upaniṣads*, that a copy of the book used to lie open on his table and he read it every-night before retiring to rest. That he should speak so highly of the *Upaniṣads* means a great deal. Scheupenheur was usually so chary of bestowing praise upon men and things. He held the view that "the influence of the Sanskrit literature will penetrate not less deeply than did the revival of Greek Letters in the fifteenth century." This prophecy of Scheupenheur made in eighteenth century seems to be about to be fulfilled. A very great interest is being evinced in all European countries in Indian

Philosophy, thanks to the efforts of many Indian and Western scholars to present Indian Thought to the people of the West.

The ultimate reality is described in the *Upaniṣads* as the source of whatever exists in the world. The doctrine is illustrated by beautiful similes and metaphors. The *Muṇḍuka-Upaniṣad* 2. 2. 11, says :—

> "Brahma indeed is this immortal, Brahma before
> Brahma behind, to right and to left.
> Stretched forth below and above
> Brahma, indeed is this whole world, this widest extant."

"Both He, who is here in a person, and He who is yonder in the Sun, He is One" (*Tait.-Up.* 3, 10, 4) In *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 6, 12, Śvetaketu asks his father, Uddālaka, how the vast universe of diverse things can arise out of undifferentiated Being or *Sat*. In reply the father asks the son to fetch a fruit of the oak tree.

> "Here it is, Sir," says Śvetaketu.
> 'Break it and let me know what you see there.'
> There are little seeds in it, Sir.
> 'Break one of the seeds and tell me what you see in it.'
> I see nothing in it, Sir, replied Śvetaketu.

"And yet," says the father, "inside that little seed, there is an invisible force which ultimately changes the tiny seed into a big tree with numerous branches, leaves and fruits. Similarly all that exists in the universe was in that *Sat*, which thou art also."

The expression "Thou art that" has been variously interpreted by later commentators, giving rise to the well known Indian philosophies of dualism, non-dualism and qualified dualism.

We find in the *Upaniṣads* the development of the idea of Ātmā or the self as well. Objective phenomena are the first to draw attention, but very soon the idea of a soul as something different from the body and other material objects takes hold of the mind of a thinking person. It may then lead him to make an attempt to find a place for these disparate elements in the same universal world-ground. According to the *Upaniṣadic* thinkers, the soul in man is in essence not different from the universal soul of all things. "He who breathes in with your breathing in," says Yājñavalkya," is the soul (Ātmā) of yours, which is in all things. He who breathes out with your breathing out is the soul of yours, which is in all things (*Brih.-Up.* 3. 4. 1)." The essence of both, therefore, is the same. The universal reality is also of the nature of Ātmā by reason of the reality of the directly known self, which necessarily constitutes a part of that ground of all being. So ultimately Brahma and Ātmā become indistinguishable and indentical. "The soul which pervades all beings, this is Brahma (*Śvet.-Up.* 1. 16)." The Ātmā is Brahma (*Ait.-Up.* 5-3)." We thus find Ātmā and Brahma being interchangeably used as the designation of the ultimate World-ground.

In the *Upaniṣads*, we find for the first time a

clear enunciation of the doctrine of transmigration of soul. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 4, 3-4, gives a beautiful description of the fortunes of the soul and in the same connection develops the doctrines of metempsychosis as well as that of the law of Karma, according to which our Karmas or deeds inevitably produce their effects, either in this life or in the next life. Man is thus shown to be the maker of his own destiny at all stages of his existence. A most detailed account of the doctrine is given in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad.*

Ultimately the individual soul attains to oneness with the ultimate reality, when all its Karmas are exhausted and it is freed from the bondage of desires.

But we must remember that everything in the *Upaniṣads* is not of equal value. We rather find here thinkers of various kinds gradually finding their way towards the most satisfactory conception of reality. We find them groping for truth, trying out various solutions, and unhesitatingly abandoning those conclusions which later on proved to be inadequate. Water, air and other material elements are presented by some thinkers of the *Upaniṣads* as the ultimate ground of things. *Prāṇa* (life) and *Manas* (mind) also find a place, till ultimately the conception of Brahma and Ātmā gain paramountcy over all the others. One finds here philosophy in the making and so we find in the *Upaniṣads* startings points of all the later systems of Indian philosophy.

Social Equality in Spiritual Quest

The *Upaniṣads* make no distinction between one person and another on the basis of caste, Āśrama, sex or social position, in imparting instruction on *Brhama-vidyā*. All persons are eligible for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, provided they have necessary intellectual and moral qualifications. Uddālaka and Balāki are Brāhmaṇa householders, but they without any hesitation seek knowledge from Kṣatriya kings. Jana-śruti is a Śūdra ; Satyakāma an orphan of illegitimate birth, Maitrī and Gārgī are women and Uśasti Cākrāyaṇa is without any social status, or even a home. But they are all held worthy of instruction on divine subjects on account of their noble character.

From the *Upaniṣads* one gets the impression, that religion and philosophy were not the monopoly of the Brāhmaṇas. We read of well-known Brāhmiṇa teachers receiving instruction from Kṣatriya kings. The courts of Janaka and Ajātaśatru rang with the sounds of religious disputations where teachers of all classes assembled for taking part in religious discourses. It was a period of keen intellectual life and cultured as well as ordinary people felt equally interested in the solution of ultimate problems.

The following story from *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* proves that in the time of the *Upaniṣads* no special importance was attached to Brāhmaṇa descent for instruction in spiritual knowledge.

Satyakāma, the son of Jābālā, addressed his mother and said, "I wish to become a Brahmacārī (religious student), mother. Of what family am I ?" She said to him, "I do not know, child, of what family thou art.[1] In my youth when I had to move about much as a servant I conceived thee. I do not know of what family thou art. I am Jābālā by name. Thou art Satyakāma. Say that thou art Satyakāma Jābāla."

He going to Goutama Haridrumata, said to him, "I wish to become a Brahmacārī with you, Sir. May I come to you, Sir, ?"

He said to him, "Of what family you are my friend ?" He replied, "I do not know, sir, of what family I am. I asked my mother and she answered. "In my youth when I had to move about much as a servant I conceived thee. I do not know of what family thou art. I am Jābālā by name. Thou art Satyakāma". "I am, therefore, Satyakāma Jābāla, Sir".[1]

He said to him, "No one but a true Brāhmaṇa would speak truth. Go and fetch fuel, friend. I shall initiate thee. You have not swerved from the truth."

In post *Upaniṣadic* period of Indian culture narrow views came to prevail and śūdras and women were excluded from the study of sacred writings. "Castes are, no doubt, mentioned in the *Upaniṣads*, but they existed in those days more as a natural division of social functions than as a stereo-typed

1. Translated by Max Muller : S.B.E. Vol., 1 p. 60.

hierarchy of social orders. The caste of a man depended more on his professional work and character than on the mere accident of birth, and everyone in those days enjoyed full freedom to choose his own line of work or profession. No stigma or disqualification was attached to a person simply because he followed a particular profession."[1]

The Vedāṅgas

We shall make here a brief reference to certain Sūtra texts, which are also known as Vedāṅgas or limbs of the Vedas. They are supplementary sciences, the knowledge of which was necessary in the later Vedic period in order to understand the Vedic texts. They took their rise almost at the same time as the Brāhmaṇas and, therefore, they also belong to the Vedic age of Indian History. There are six Vedāṅgas. The earliest enumeration of the Vedāṅgas is given in the *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad,* which teaches distinction between the higher knowledge and the lower knowledge. The higher knowledge is the knowledge of the imperishable Brahma, while the lower knowledge is that of the four Vedas and the Six Vedāṇgas which are named as *Śikṣā* (Phonetics), *Kalpa* (Ritual), *Vyākaraṇa* (Grammar), *Nirukta* (Etymology), *Chanda* (Metrics) and *Jyotiṣa* (Astronomy).

The *Kalpa-Sūtras* give the rules of the sacrificial rituals in "a shorter, more manageable and connected form for the practical purposes of the

1. Sen, *The Mystic Philosophy of Upanishads*, p. 157.

priests." These rules were either meant for use during the big sacrifices or for use during the performance of various domestic sacraments or *Saṁskāras*, and the five daily *Yajñas*, which were obligatory for the Aryan house-holders in the Vedic times. The *Sūtras* which contain directions for the performance of big sacrifices are known as *Śrauta-Sūtras*, while the Sūtras giving instructions for the performance of periodic *Saṁskāras* and daily sacrifices are called *Gṛhya-Sūtras*. There is also a third class of Sūtra texts, which may be regarded as the continuation of *Gṛhya-Sūtras*, but which are given the name of *Dharma-Sūtras*, because they deal with Dharma or 'the secular and religious law. These Sūtras lay down rules and regulations for the duties of the four *Varṇas* and the people in each of the four stages of life, or *Āśramas*. All these three classes of *Sūtras* form the component parts of the *Vedāṅga* known as *Kalpa*. The *Kalpa-Sūtras* may be regarded as supplementary to the *Brāhmaṇas*, as they deal mainly with sacrifices which form the subject matter of the *Brāhmaṇas*. The remaining five *Vedāṅgas* are related to the *Saṁhitās*, and are meant to be of help in the right pronunciation and understanding of Vedic texts. A knowledge of these subsidiary sciences was held indispensable for the student of the *Saṁhitās*, specially in the later Vedic Age.

The *Sūtra* form of literature may be regarded

as the invention of the Aryans, and has no parallel in any other language of the world. A *Sūtra* is an abbreviated sentence from which all unnecessary parts are dropped including even the verb. The author of the *Sūtra* tries to say as much as possible in as few words as possible, even at the cost of making the whole thing obscure and unintelligible. As a matter of fact, the *Sūtra* literature cannot be understood without the help of commentaries, of which there is an abundance on each *Sūtra* text. These *Sūtra* texts were meant to be committed to memory by scholars specializing in those texts. The meaning of those texts they already knew by the oral instruction of the teacher. Afterwards the explanations of teachers were written down in the form of commentaries for use by the later generations of scholars.

It is said that the Sūtra style arose out of the prose of *Brāhmaṇas*, which generally consists of short sentences without any effort at synthesis by the use of relative or conditional clauses.

This brings us to the end of the Vedic period of Indian culture.



BOOK II

Movements of Reform

CHAPTER I

Buddhism and Jainism

We now enter a new phase in the transformation of Indian culture. The costly sacrifices and elaborate ritualism of the *Brāhamaṇas* gradually produced a reaction in the minds of the people. The Vedic religion at this stage became the religion of wealthy and well-to-do classes, quite beyond the means of common people. Apart from the greed of the priestly class, the desire for pomp and show on the part of kings and aristocracy played a great part in making sacrifices more and more expensive and complicated. The animal sacrifices, which were a normal feature of religious observances in the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*, further led to a revulsion against the prevalent religion. Sometimes a hundred animals and even more were slaughtered at a single sacrifice. The element of devotion was altogether

lacking, and the sacrifices were supposed to possess the magical power of bringing about the fulfilment of all desires; of course if they were correctly performed.

All these things taken together brought down the prestige of *Brāhmaṇical* religion in the eyes of the people. Even the goal of material happiness in this world, and unrestricted enjoyment in heaven after death ceased to make an appeal to the thoughtful people of the age. The times were thus ripe for a change. The *Upaniṣads* by-passed the importance of sacrifice by stressing divine knowledge as the means of self-realisation. The desire for heavenly bliss gave place to an aspiration for the knowledge of self and the mode of its union with the Supreme Being. But the profound speculations of *Upaniṣadic* thinkers were too abstruse for the common people; and therefore, they did not make any impression on the masses at large. Their appeal was confined to a small cultural minority.

But in the meantime a great upheaval of ideas was going on among the thoughtful people in various parts of the country. Once the old religion began to be questioned, there was bound to be an exploration of new fields of religious thought and observance. In Buddhistic works we find a reference to the existence of more than sixty philosophical and religious doctrines in the country. Of the many new religious sects which sprang up everywhere, four attained to a

position of eminence among the people, and exercised a lasting influence on the development of Indian culture in subsequent periods. Two of them, *i.e.* Buddhism and Jainism did not accept the authority of the *Vedas* or the priestly classes and condemned animal sacrifices. The other two, *i.e.* Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, simply ignored the sacrificial cult of the *Brāhmaṇas*, composed their own scriptures and gave birth to the religion of devotion. Temples were built and the images of Śiva and Viṣṇu were installed in them for purposes of worship. As these sects did not make any direct attack upon the *Brāhmaṇas* and the Vedic scriptures, they were gradually accepted as reformed forms of orthodox religion, and were, in course of time, given a place in *Brāhmanical* works such as the Epics and the *Purāṇas*.

Even during the heyday of Vedic religion, the non-Aryans carried on their own modes of worship and their own system of thought. When the Vedic religion lost its hold upon the people, the non-Aryan modes of worship began to attract their attention, and gradually succeeded in ousting the Vedic gods and Vedic sacrifices from the religious life of the people.

The Pūjā form of worship is in all likelihood Dravidian in its origin as contrasted to the sacrificial cult of the Aryans. The Pūjā ritual with flowers etc., which is found in Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, seems to be borrowed from non-Aryan sources. Even the various gods and goddesses in modern Hinduism, such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Hanūmān,

Gaṇeśa etc. are the gifts of the non-Aryans to present day Hinduism. The worship of the idols of gods and goddesses and the phallic worship are all of non-Aryan origin.

It is suggested by Slater[1], that Śiva and Viṣṇu are local variants of the same deity, Viṣṇu belonging to a more northernly and Śiva to a more southernly part of India. They are not Vedic deities, though later on they came to be identified with Viṣṇu and Rudra of the Vedic tradition. Both of them are the gods of creation and destruction, the destructive processes paving the way to fresh acts of creation. The creative function of Śiva is very well represented in the Liṅga symbol, and the destructive aspect of Viṣṇu is most impressively described in the eleventh chapter of *Bhagavad-Gītā*, a most important work of Vaiṣṇavism or Bhagavata religion. On seeing the most splendid divine form of Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna claims, "I see all the noblest warriors of both the armies rush into thy gaping mouths, some caught within the cavities of the teeth, their heads crushed and ground to powder. All-swallowing, fierytongued, thou lickest thy lips, after devouring them all."

The fact, that in the *Ṛgveda* phallic worship is referred to with disapproval, points to the non-Aryan origin of the cult of Śiva. Similarly the whole idea of the incarnation of Viṣṇu in human and animal forms is clearly a non-Vedic idea. "Śaktism and the worship of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa" says Sir Charles Elliot,

1. *The Dravadian Element in Indian Culture, p. 103*

"together with many less conspicuous cults all entered Brāhmaṇism in this way. Whenever a popular cult grew important, or whenever Brāhmaṇic influence spread to a new district possessing such a cult, the popular cult was recognised and Brāhmaṇised."[1]

We shall now take up one by one the important movements, which arose in protest against the Brāhmaṇical religion at the close of the Vedic period.

Buddhism

Buddhism and Jainism are regarded by the Brāhmaṇas as unorthodox religions. It has been suggested by some writers that Buddha and Mahāvīra both belonged to royal families, which were predominantly non-Aryan in blood. Like most of the present day people of Nepal, these families were most probably of a mixed Aryan Mongoloid origin, who in spite of having adopted the Aryan mode of life still retained many features of non-Aryan thought and practice.

It is said, that the portion of the Gangetic valley, where lay the kingdom of Kapilavastu had not till then been brought completely under Brāhmaṇic influence, which was stronger in the western regions. Although the Vedic culture had penetrated the eastern districts, the inhabitants of these districts were to a large extent independent of the Brāhmaṇas. We have no evidence" says Rhys Davids, "that there was

1. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. 1, p. 104.

any large number of Brāhmaṇas, settled in the country which was inhabited by a high caste tribe forming the Śākya clan".[1]

Towards the close of the sixth century B.C., a remarkable child was born to the king of Kapilavastu, a small kingdom on the borders of Nepal. From earlier life Siddhārtha was given to reflection on the problems of life and though surrounded by a superabundance of luxuries, he could not give himself wholeheartedly to the enjoyment of earthly pleasures. At the age of 29, he gave up his home, his parents, his young wife and the only son, and took to the life of an ascetic. After seven years of spiritual experiments and heart-searchings, he proclaimed that he had attained the goal of perfection. Since that time he was known as the Buddha or the enlightened one. For forty-four years after that he preached his way of life to all kinds of people irrespective of caste, creed, and sex, on both banks of the Ganges of Bihar and parts of the present Uttara-Pradeśa. He died at the advanced age of eighty. leaving behind him a large number of devoted disciples, who carried his message far and wide. In a few centuries, Buddhism spread over large parts of China, Korea, Japan and South East Asia. At the present time about one third of the people of the world follow Buddhism and it is perhaps the most popular religion in respect of the number of its followers.

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1. *Buddhism*, p. 91.

In his life-time, the sweet, calm and noble bearing of Buddha profoundly impressed all those who came into his presence. He had an infinite tenderness for living creatures, and a heart full of compassion for suffering humanity. His disciples were required to direct their efforts towards saving other people from a life of misery and suffering. They were, of course, to submit themselves to a rigorous moral and spiritual discipline. But all these acquistions were to be used in the service of others.

The Four Noble Truths

The teachings of Buddha were given in the form of four noble truths. The first truth was about the existence of suffering. Life according to Buddha is series of sufferings. To exist is to suffer. There is suffering in birth, growth, decay, disease and death. There is sorrow in separation from the objects we love, and in being united to objects we hate. Craving for things we want and cannot obtain is a cause of sorrow. A desire satisfied soon gives rise to another desire, and so the cycle of life goes on from one birth to another.

The second truth taught by Buddha was, that every sorrow has a cause. This cause lies in desire or thirst which has no end and which increases with each act of gratification and desire has its roots in ignorance.

The third truth is concerned with cessation of sorrow or pain. The cessation of pain is possible by

the complete conquest of the eager thirst or lust for life.

The fourth truth gives the eightfold path, which leads to the removal of sorrow in all its forms. The path consisted of right belief, right resolution, right speech, right action, right means of livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right self-concentration. Each thought, each action and each feeling must be of the right kind and this naturally requires a state of self-awareness. The goal of the eightfold path is concentrated cognition.

The path of life which Buddha recommends is generally known as the 'middle path'. It requires a person, on the one hand, not to succumb to the enervating pleasures of sense and, on the other hand, to avoid the other extreme of mortifying the body unnecessarily, as was the practice of many ascetics in his time.

The chief characteristic of the teaching of Buddha is that it lays emphasis on the essence of religion rather than on superficial rituals and dogmas. The main problem of religion according to Buddha is to point out the way to the removal of suffering and unhappiness. If there were no suffering, there would be no religion. In fact it is suffering which posits a problem for religion to solve. Buddha confined himself to the solution of this problem, and did not allow anybody to deflect him into what he regarded as futile discussions about the nature of

ultimate reality and other similar mataphysical problems. The religious life according to Buddha, did not depend on the solution of these problems. Even if they were satisfactorily solved, there would still remain birth, old age, death, grief, sorrow in myriad forms. "Why have I not elucidated these things" he said to one of his disciples, "because, Malunkiya Putta, it profits not, nor has it to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to aversion, absence of passion, supreme wisdom and *Nirvāṇa*. The origin of misery have I elucidated, the cessation of misery and the path leading to the cessation of misery because all these are the fundamentals of religions."

Buddha did not teach the separate existence of ego or self. What goes by the name of ego or 'I' is a compound of a number of constituents. There exists nothing beyond these aggregates either a self or a simple permanent substance of any kind. These aggregates unite themselves so as to form a particular being, undergo constant modifications and dissolve at the time of death. This point is explained in Buddhistic works with the help of the similes of a chariot, a house, a tree, a city, a body etc. etc. Just as a chariot has no existence of its own apart from the parts of which it is made up, so there is no ego apart from its constituents such as the body, sensation, perception, mental aggregates and consciousness. The ego is impermanent and is in process of incessant change like every other object of the world. A young

infant and a grown up person are not the identical self, just as the flame in the beginning is not the same as the flame in the end. The doctrine of Buddha bears resemblance to that of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who taught that every thing was in a state of flux or change. "You cannot step into the same river twice," he said. All things change from moment to moment. Buddha wanted his disciples to practise aversion and indifference to the ego. The action, which is rooted in the ego, inevitably brings unhappiness. Tṛṣṇā and egoistic consciousness are practically the same thing.

Whatever exists, is necessarily connected with what has gone before. The effect is not the cause in a new form but it is undoubtedly connected with it. This is the Buddhist theory of dependent origination. According to it what appears is quite new and yet at the same time it is dependent upon the pre-existing cause. The belief of the Buddhists in the theory of rebirth and the law of Karma has to be understood in the light of their theory of dependent origination. They do not believe that in rebirth the same self transmigrates to another body, and yet the new birth is somehow connected with the previous life of that person. If a man were to light a candle from another candle, it will not be right to say that the light of the first candle has passed into the second, and yet the new light is somehow connected with the old light. According to Buddha, the effects of the deeds of an individual survive his death, and through those

effects, the formation of a new group of aggregates is brought about in this world or in some other world, and thus a new individual rises into existence on the basis of the effects of the deeds of the previous individual. The new in this way continues the old existence.

It is very difficult to say outright, that according to Buddha nothing substantial underlies the ego. Buddha himself never gave any categorical answer to such enquiries. A wandering monk, Vacchagotta once asked Buddha, "How does the matter stand, Venerable Gautama. Is there the ego ?" Buddha remained silent. "Is there then not the ego ? Venerable Sir." There was no answer again, and being baffled, he went away. When Ānanda asked him the cause of his silence afterwards, Buddha said, "If I had said there is an ego, he would have gone away with the false belief in the permanence of what is transient. If I had said, there is not ego, it would have confirmed the belief in annihilation." These opposed statements make it difficult to understand the real position of Buddha in regard to this problem. It is said that after the death of Buddha, the king of Kosala questioned the learned nun Khemā, "Venerable Lady, does the perfect one exist after death ?" "Great King," she replied, "he has not declared that he does." "Then does he not exists after death ?" "He has neither declared that he does not." Seeing the king in a confused state of mind, she tried to make herself clear by saying,

"The state of the perfect one cannot be described in human terms. He is now deep, immeasurable and unfathomable as the ocean, and the terms of neither existence nor non-existence fit him any more."[1]

The world of phenomena, as Buddha saw it, was a process of incessant change and becoming. The change is continuous and is never arrested. Every thing is passing into something different, and this process has no end. But every change takes place according to a law, as assumed in the Buddhistic theory of dependent origination. The change is not arbitrary; it is subject to a compelling law.

The question naturally arises, whether there is any thing unchanging behind all the changing phenomena, both mental and physical. Is it possible to understand change without a background of permanence? There is a well known saying of Buddha, which throws some light on this question. It occurs in *Udāna* 3, 3, "There is an unborn, and unoriginated, and uncompounded. Were this not so, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, and the compound." This seems to point clearly to the presence of an unchanging eternal reality underneath the world of appearances. Buddha, however, does not make any serious attempt to arrive at metaphysical conclusions about the nature of reality and the origin of phenomena. It appears that our finite minds are not able to comprehend the infinite and the eternal. The reality

1. *Avyakata Saṃyutta*, 1.

whatever it might be cannot be described in human terms. It can only be experienced. Buddha himself realised the Truth, and the enlightenment is open to all those, who are prepared to tread the path of moral discipline and self-concentration. The Buddhists speak of the path as a Yāna, that is, a vehicle or a boat. It will not be helpful to describe to any one what lies on the other side of the river. After you have crossed it, you will see for yourself the beautiful things on the other side. The function of the Yāna is simply to help you to cross over to the other bank and see things for yourselves.

Buddha preached his doctrines in the language of the people, by means of parables, similes and simple precepts. His main emphasis was on morality and good conduct as well as on meditational exercises. He taught people to be kind and compassionate, to cultivate reverence, humility and self-restraint, and never to be weary in well-doing. This new message naturally made a strong appeal to the masses and the thoughtful alike. To them, the religion of Buddha appeared as a harbinger of love and compassion, as contrasted to the cold and arid formalism of Brāhmaṇism, and so the people flocked in thousands to seek comfort from the teachings of the great master.

Earlier Buddhism was mainly concerned with the attainment of moral perfection, and for that purpose it was necessary to join the order of monks and live

a life of complete renunciation and self-abnegation. While the laymen could benefit more or less from the teachings of Buddha, it was only the Bhikṣus, who derived the fullest spiritual advantages, as they could devote their whole time to the pursuit of enlightenment, Gradually as time passed, the conception of Buddha underwent a change. From a human being of extraordinary powers, he came to be looked upon as the eternal principle of existence, without origin or decay. In course of time, the idea of *Tr-kāya* became current. First there was the *Dharma-kāya*, the unborn eternal and infinite principle. When this eternal principle appeared in a refulgent form for the benefit of the Bodhisattvas, it was then known as *Sombhoga-kāya*. When it assumed an earthly form for the guidance of the common people of the world, it was called *Nirmāṇa-kāya* or *Rūpa-kāya*. Gautam Buddha was the *Nirmaṇa-kāya* of the real Buddha who is the eternal and infinite principle of the world of phenomena. This change of conception brought Buddhism in line with the conception of Brahma already developed in the *Upaniṣads*. It was the work of the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism, which had come into existence by about the beginning of Christian era. The earlier conceptions of Buddhism came to be known by contrast as the Hīnāyana school. Under this new conception, Buddha became an object of devotion and his icons in different poses were worshipped in various Buddhistic temples and monastaries.

Beside introducing the element of devotion in Buddhism, and thereby making it a popular religion, the Mahāyāna movement laid a great stress on the life of altruism, and made active service and compassion a necessary part of religion. According to the Mahāyānists, effacement of self could only take place by dedicating oneself to the service of others. Mere asceticism or meditation alone was not enough. Buddhism naturally met with a ready welcome from the people of the land as well as the foriegn hordes, who invaded India in the early Christian centuries. The ancient religion of the Brāhmaṇas could not compete with it on its own terms.

Buddha and Earlier Thought

Although Buddha preached an independent system of thought and religion, he was influenced, as is but natural, by the thought and religion prevalent in his time. The doctrine of Anatta or not-Ātmā is probably the old *Upaniṣadic* doctrine of Ātmā described in his own characteristic and original way. His emphasis was more upon what Ātmā was not, than upon what it was. He analysed all elements of the personality : body, sensation, perception, mental aggregates, and consciousness and found them all to be transitory and perishable. They were non-essential or Anatta. If there was anything beyond these components of personality, Buddha did not declare it in positive terms, nor did he declare against such a reality. The reality is incognizable by the activity

of thought. He took the *Neti, Neti* doctrine of the *Upaniṣads* in a most rigorous manner and would not say anything even when asked what the real self was. "The right way to get at least on the track of our essence or our Ātmā" says a writer, "is only to ask what in any case am I not?" For this reason the doctrine of Buddha is called the Anatta-vāda as contrasted to the Ātma-vāda of the *Upaniṣads*. But it would be wrong to suppose that he altogether denied the Atta or Ātmā. Of course, he denies the permanence of ego, which is only an assemblage of a number of constituents but even in *Vedānta* the ego is not held as equivalent to Ātmā or the permanent entity. It would not be wrong to say that Buddha taught the Anatta method of reaching perfection, i.e. constant reflection of what the Ātmā was not, or in other words, taking away all those things with which we are liable to identify our real I or self. It may, therefore, be said that the Anatta doctrine of Buddha was the development of the Ātmā doctrine of the *Upaniṣads* and not a negation of it. This is quite in line with *Sāṅkhya* psychology which is accepted by the *Vedānta* as well.

Buddha, therefore, was right in criticising the idea of the permanence of ego or the mind, but it appears that he occasionally used the word Ātmā as a designation of the impermanent ego in a number of his dialogues. It seems that Buddha in these cases had recourse to the popular use of the term Ātmā ignoring the higher aspects of the *Upaniṣadic* religion.

It must be clearly understood that Buddha does not deny the real self or Brahma. He simply does not make any reference to it, as in his view it can never be known by cognitive thought. It is a void or *Śūnya* of which nothing can be predicated, but it can be realised by meditation and this condition of realisation is called *Nirvāṇa* by Buddha. *Nirvāṇa* in Buddhism is not a negative conception. It has been described as a condition of profound wisdom and blissfulness, more or less like the realisation of Brahma in the *Upaniṣads*.

The practice of *Dhyāna* or contemplation in Buddhism is in line with *Yoga* system, which was in vogue during the time of Buddha. "The spiritual exercises of the Buddhist contemplation" says Anand Kumar Swamy, "are taken over almost unchanged from Brāhmaṇical sources."[1] The idea of Yogic exercises as the means of liberating our spiritual powers is well given in the following passage from Shelling's Philosophical Letters upon dogmatism and criticism. "In all of us there dwells a secret marvellous power of freeing ourselves from the changes of time, of withdrawing to our secret selves away from external things, and so discovering to ourselves the eternal in us, in the form of unchangeability. This presentation of ourselves to ourselves is the most truly personal experience upon which depends everything, that of knowing the super-sensuous world."[2]

1. *Buddha and Gospel of Buddhism*, p. 197.
2. Quoted *Ibid*, p. 197.

The importance of Yoga was held alike in Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism.

Jainism

Jainism in its present form was founded by Vardhamāna, who is also known as Mahāvīra. Mahāvīra, however, is not regarded as the originator of the doctrine, which is said to have a long tradition behind it. In fact, the Jainas believe in the existence of a long line of twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras or religious preceptors, of whom Mahāvīra was the last. But he gave a systematic form to the traditional doctrines, and he had so great a sanctity and holiness about him, that in the eyes of the devout and pious followers of Jainism, he is virtually the founder of their religion.

Mahāvīra was an elder contemporary of Buddha, and he is also said to be of royal birth. They both preached their doctrines in the same parts of the country and their holy places also lie near one another, in Bihar, in Gujrāt, on Mount Ābu in Rājasthāna as well as in some other places. As long as Buddhism was a popular religion in India, Jainism remained overshadowed by it ; but strange though it is, while Buddhism has completely vanished from the land of its birth, Jainism continues to exist in various parts of India, though it does not claim a very large number of followers.

Like Buddhism, Jainism also repudiates the authority of the *Vedas* and the superiority of Brāhmaṇas, and does not attach any importance to the

caste system. In both Buddhism and Jainism, Kṣatriyas are looked upon as superior to the Brāhmaṇas. Not a single Tīrthaṅkara among the Jainas is believed to have come from the Brāhmaṇa class. All the Tīrthaṅkras are represented as having descended from the Kṣatriya families of noble blood. Jainism like Buddhism attaches very great importance to Ahiṁsā or non-injury, but it has carried the notion of Ahiṁsā much farther than any other sect in India. Naturally it could not have any sympathy with the Brāhmaṇical religion of its time, which believed in animal sacrifices as the means of attaining heaven. Not heaven but perfection or *Nirvāṇa* was preached in Jainism as the goal of life. And the virtues of gentleness, piety, liberality and kindness were recommended as the means of attaining perfection.

The Jainas do not believe in any creator of the world or in the possiblity of a perfect being existing from all eternity. The great apostles of Jainism became perfect as the result of their great efforts. They were not always so.

Unlike the Buddhists, the Jainas believe in the eternal existence of souls, besides matter. In fact everything has a soul, according to them, within its visible body. Men, animals, plants even the particles of earth, water, air and fire have souls in them though generally animate beings only appear to possess souls.

The Jainas as a rule do not assert, that only a particular view of the universe can be right. They

concede to the other views also a modicum of Truth from their point of view. They are, however, not prepared to make any compromise with their view on Ahiṁsā and asceticism as guiding principle of life. Faith in the teacher, knowledge of the doctrine and perfect conduct constitutes the *Tṛ-ratna* or three jewels, for reaching the state of blessedness or *Nirvāṇa.* It consists in getting free from the stains of imperfections acquired by the soul by associating with matter. This doctrine is very much like the *Sāṅkhya* view, which regards misery and imperfection as the consequence of the identification of Jīva with Prakṛti.

Both Buddhism and Jainism appealed to a large number of such people, as did not find any solace in the religion of animal sacrifices and of rigid caste divisions.



CHAPTER II

Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism

We shall now describe the two important religious sects, which very soon spread over the whole of India, and in course of time succeeded in capturing the imagination of the people to such an extent, that Buddhism lost its popularity and importance, and in course of time became almost extinct in the land of its birth. These religious systems took shape soon after the rise of Buddhism in about the third or fourth century B.C., and though they occupied a modest position during the heyday of Buddhism, they gradually rose to prominence in the country. By the fifth century A.D. Buddhism had lost its vitality and entered upon a period of decay. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism easily took the place vacated by Buddhism.

The cult of Śiva is said to have a long history, and is believed to have been prevalent even during the Vedic age. An image of male deity, found in the ruins of Mohinjodaro, is regarded to be the image of

Śiva in his meditational pose. Later on Śiva came to be associated with the Vedic God Rudra. In the *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* which is one of the later *Upaniṣads*, the God Śiva is represented as Mahādeva.

The earliest historical record of the worship of Śiva is found in the chronicle of Magesthenes in about 300 B.C. Patañjali in 200 B.C. referred to the worship of Śiva and his icons. Some of the Kuśāna kings in the beginning of Christian era, are said to have been the followers of Śaiva cult. Their coins bear on them the images of Śiva, with the emblem of the sacred bull. In south India the land of the Dravadians, the worship of Śiva seems to have been current from very old times.

In the Śaiva system, Śiva is a supreme being, infinite and eternal, who brings about the dissolution and regeneration of the world-process in endless cycles. He is the impersonal power, pervading all phenomena but Śaivism lays greater emphasis on the personal aspect of Śiva than on the impersonal one. From the personal point of view, Śiva is supposed to have a bodily form and he can think, feel and act. In all religions of devotion, a personal god becomes almost a necessity to whom the devotee can open his heart and address his prayers.

In Śaivism the creative and destructive aspects of the deity are alternatively brought into prominence. As Rudra, he is the terrific god of destruction, but he is also the beneficent lord, who regenerates the world

and showers blessings on mankind. In this aspect he is known as Śiva- the blessed and auspicious god.

His abode is supposed to be Kailāśa in the Himālayan region, where he lives with his consort Pārvatī also known as Durgā, Kālī, Umā, Bhavānī, Satī etc,. and with his two sons Skanda and Gaṇeśa, along with a large number of troops called the Gaṇas, placed under the command of Gaṇeśa.

He is represented in a bodily form sometimes with five faces and sometimes with only one. He is invariably shown with three eyes, the third being in the centre of the forehead, symbolically conveying the idea that a supreme being knows the past, the present and the future at the same time. His body is shown as smeared with ashes, with a necklace of human skulls adorning his neck and serpents and similar hideous creatures coiling about his person. He holds all sorts of weapons in his hands to fight against demons and evil spirits. The underlying motive is to convey in a concrete form the idea of endless destruction and recreation, and the never-ending fight against the forces of evil and darkness, which is constantly going on.

As already indicated Śiva personifies in one of his aspects, the destructive process of nature. Under this aspect he is looked upon as the terrible god, who towards the end of a cycle destroys every thing including the gods. He thus becomes the Mahākāla or the Rudra. But he is equally the impersonation of the creative or reproductive powers of nature. Under

this aspect he is called Śiva, Śaṇkara and Śambhu and it is in this character, that he is worshipped throughout India in the form of the symbol of Liṅga. The early specimens of this symbol, as extant today, were very realistic in shape. But later on it was modified in appearance to such an extent that it now does not bear much resemblance to its earlier forms.

Śiva is also characterised as a Mahāyogī or a great ascetic. It was in this character, that he burnt to ashes the god of Kāma or love with one flash of his eye. Many of the followers of Śiva are ascetics, going about with naked ash-covered bodies, and practising all sorts of austerities. Sometimes the austerities are carried to a fantastic length.

Quite in contrast to this character, Śiva is also represented as wild and jovial, given to drinking and dancing. One of his names is *Naṭeśvara*, the god of dancing. This is perphaps to correct the one-sided view of reality. Power, self-suppression and joy are counter-balancing factors and take their rise from the same supreme being. Reality in some of its aspects is sombre indeed; but it is also full of joy and expansiveness. Out of a misunderstanding of this character of Śiva, arose the Vāma-mārga sect of Śāktas, who include sex and wine as integral parts of their worship. They call themselves Śāktas or worshippers of Śakti, the female counter part of Śiva. It is with the help of Śakti that Śiva brings the world into manifestation. It is now generally conceded, that most of the elements in the worship of Śiva are

borrowed from non-Aryan sources. As R. G. Bhandarkar says, "Rudra's partiality for serpents and his being the lord of spirits or Bhūtas were probably due to the influence of the serpent worship of the savage tribes."[1]

Bhāgavata Religion or Vaiṣṇavism

Vaiṣṇavism is a religion of those, who worship Viṣṇu as a supreme god. It is in fact the chief religion of the majority of Hindus. Śaivism being rather cold and austere in comparision, has not the same wide appeal as Vaiṣṇavism has. The largest number of temples throughout India are dedicated to the worship of Viṣṇu either in his own person or in the form of his incarnations as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Like Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism is also a devotional religion.

Viṣṇu is described as living in Baikuṇṭha, with his spouse Lakṣmī or Śrī, the goddess of beauty and wealth. He is represent ed as having four arms holding a *cakra* (a wheel) a *śaṅkha* (a conch shell), a *gadā* (a club), and a *padma* (a lotus) respectively in each of his four hands. His vehicle is a mythical eagle-like bird called Garuḍa, just as the bull is the vehicle of Siva. Garuḍa is said to be the enemy and destroyer of serpents, the symbols of sin and evil.

Though the name Viṣṇu occurs in the *Ṛgveda*, the earliest reference to the religion of Vasudeva, out

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1. R. G. Bhandarkar : *Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 115.

of which the later Vaiṣṇavism developed, is found in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 4.3, 98, in the fifth century B. C. Pāṇini explains Vāsudevaka as a person, whose object of devotion is Vāsudeva. We also find a reference to the worship of Vāsudeva in Magasthenes in about the third century B. C.

It seems that Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, the hero and leader of the Vṛṣṇi sect of the Yādava clan, was also a great religious teacher, who laid the foundation of the Bhāgavata religion. The best exposition of the main doctrines of this religion is found in the world-famous *Bhagavad-Gītā*. In *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*, there is a reference to a sage Kṛṣṇa who was the disciple of Ṛṣi Ghora. The doctrines, which are ascribed to Ghora Ṛṣi in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*, bear some resemblance to those of *Bhagavad-Gītā*. He might have taught those doctrines to Kṛṣna, who later developed and systematised them, as they are found in *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

Originally, the name of the new religion was Bhāgavata religion. When Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa came to be identified with the Vedic god Viṣṇu, the Bhāgavata religion was also named as Vaiṣṇava religion. It is said, that identification of Vāsudeva with Viṣṇu was done on purpose by the Brāhmaṇas, so that this very influential and growing religion could be brought within the pale of orthodox Brāhmaṇism.

There are many parts of *Mahābhārata*, in which the divinity of Kṛṣṇa is not acknowledged. The Siśupāla episode is an indication of this fact. But by

the time, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* was composed, the identification of Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu had been accomplished and he had come to be looked upon as a divine being.

There is no reference to the cult of Vāsudeva in Aśoka's inscriptions. It, therefore, gained eminence after the time of Aśoka. From Mathurā, the land of its origin, it spread to western India and then to Deccan. By the second century A. D. it had become popular in south India as well.

Image worship was made popular among all classes of people by the Bhāgavata religion. As already indicated, the introduction of image worship was due to non-Aryan influences. It became a common thing in India with the coming into vogue of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava forms of religion. Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva to whom the origin of Bhāgavata religion is ascribed, is always spoken of in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* as dark complexioned, his mother being the princess of an Asura or a non-Aryan noble family and his father a Kṣatriya prince of Aryan blood. He was mainly responsible for bringing about a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan ways of thought and religion.

Vaiṣṇavism was marked with the spirit of sympathy for the lower castes of Hindu society from the very beginning. Anybody, to whatever caste he might belong, can according to Vaiṣṇavism attain the highest spiritual position as the result of devotion to God. The Vaiṣṇava saints made no distinction between one caste and another. The doors of Viṣṇu

were thus open to all, who had the necessary qualification to enter into His presence, and the qualification consisted in offering a deep devotion at his august feet. But this principle of caste equality remained mostly at the theoretical level. As a large number of Brāhmaṇas and members of higher castes adopted Vaiṣṇavism, they imported their caste distinctions into the new faith.

Secondly, Vaiṣṇavism inculcates faith in a personal god. It, therefore, involves dualism or distinction between Jīva (soul) and Īśvara (god). A soul can become like god on attaining perfection but it is not completely absorbed in god so as to lose its identity.

All Vaiṣṇava sects prescribe the worship of a living religious teacher or Guru, as the embodiment of Divine essence. The attainment of perfection is only possible through the grace of a living Guru. The Guru generally initiates the disciple into the Vaiṣṇava faith by means of a special initiation ceremony. accompanied by the instruction of a special religious formula to be repeated everyday at fixed times. Children are admitted at the age of three or four years by means of a sort of Baptismal rite. At the age of thirteen or fourteen years, another ceremony is gone through, which is known as the *samarpaṇa* or self-dedication ceremony among the followers of the Vallabha sect of Vaiṣṇavism. The disciple is required to consecrate his or her body, soul and property at the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Actually it is to the living Guru that the consecration is made. This

blind devotion to the Guru sometimes results in many evils.

Vaiṣṇavism inculcates tenderness and compassion towards all animals. No Vaiṣṇava can take flesh diet or offer any animal as a sacrifice.

A very important feature of Vaiṣṇavism is the belief, that Viṣṇu during periods of stress descends into animal or human forms, which are known as *Avatāras* or incarnations of Viṣṇu. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are the two most famous incarnations, and their worship is very popular among orthodox Hindus. Viṣṇu thus differs from Śiva, who has no incarnation and is worshipped in his own person. These incarnations form so important a part of Vaiṣṇava faith, that ordinarily the worship of Viṣṇu takes place through devotion to his incarnations, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, whose images are found in most of the Vaiṣṇava temples all over India.

General Discussion of these movements

All these movements most probably arose as a reaction against the elaborate ceremonialism of the *Brāhmaṇas*, which had absolutely no devotional appeal for the masses. We find in all these movements that animal sacrifices were repudiated, caste distinctions were ignored and greater emphasis was laid upon the elements of devotion and knowledge than on mere empty ritualism. The Buddha's message of love and human brotherhood won many adherants from among the followers of Brāhmaṇical religion. People of all

castes were admitted into the Buddhist order of monks, without any distinction whatsoever.

While Buddhism and Jainism implied devotion to their respective founders, it was in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religions, that 'devotion to God under the names of Śiva and Viṣṇu respectively came to be specially emphasised. The special feature of these religions is, that a personal loving deity has taken the place of the impersonal Brahman of the earlier *Upanisads.* This idea is new and is quite strange to old Brāhmaṇism. The worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu, in all probability was not common before 300 B. C. We do not find any mention of it in the Buddhistic Pālī *Piṭakas.* It assumed a developed form by the time, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* was composed most probably a little before the Christian era. There is every reason to believe that the new development in Hindu religion had a marked effect on the transformation of early Buddhism into its later Mahāyāna form. We find a great similarity in the teaching of *Bhagavad-Gītā* and that of some of the Mahāyānist Sūtras. Sir Charles Elliot says, "The chief moral principle of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is substantially the same as that prescribed for Bodhisattvas. It teaches that action is superior to inaction, and that action should be wholly disinterested and not directed to any selfish object. This is precisely the attitude of a Bodhisattvas, to avoid the inaction of those, who are engrossed in self culture as much as

the pursuit of wealth or pleasure. Both the *Gītā* and Mahāyānist treatises lay stress on faith."[1]

We thus find that the path of devotion took the place of costly sacrifices of the Brāhmaṇas on the one hand and the path of knowledge of the *Upaniṣads* on the other. While the Karma-kāṇḍa of the *Brāhmaṇas* was a meaningless and mechanical performance, the futility of which came to be gradually recognised, the Jñāna-mārga of the *Upaniṣads* on the other hand, though full of profound wisdom and a source of perpetual delight to thoughtful people, was not within the comprehension of the common people. They gradually took up after sometime the easy path of devotion offered by Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, which were par excellance, popular religions.

Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism have been so completely assimilated into modern Hinduism, that it is difficult for most people to understand that they were in their origin protestant movements against artificial ritualism. These movements laid emphasis on inner purification and the element of devotion, which were absolutely lacking in Brāhmaṇical religion.

It goes without saying that Buddhism and other movements of this period were influenced by the Vedic tradition and thought of the previous period. T. W. Rhys Davids says, "Without the intellectual

1. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. II, p. 72.

work of his predecessors, his own work, however original, would have been impossible."[1] In the case of Śaivaism and Vaiṣṇavism some elements were, of course, borrowed from Brāhmaṇical sources. But they were given new and original forms, which in their completed shape were so different from the Vedic religion, that they cannot be regarded as mere developments or off-shoots of that religion. They were offered as substitutes for the old faith and were accepted by the people because of the general dissatisfaction against the form which Vedic religion had taken in Brāhmaṇical times.

As already stated, these sectarian religions have their own scriptures, and though they do not question the authority of the *Vedas*, their religious literature such as the *Pañcarātras* and the *Āgamas* practically supersede the Vedic scriptures, under the avowed pretext that in the degenerate Kaliyuga the *Veda* is difficult to understand and, therefore, God in His great mercy has revealed other scriptures more in consonance with the requirements of the present age.

In some of these *Vaiṣṇava Saṁhitās*, a distinction is made between the followers of the *Vedas* and "the enlightened ones who worship the Lord." It should be duly noted that *Pañcarātras* were not Brāhmaṇic in origin.

Sir Charles Elliot says, "The *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* contain legends, which though obscure refer to conflicts of the worshippers of Śiva with those who

1. *Buddhism*, p. 116.

offered Vedic sacrifices, as well as, with the votaries of Viṣṇu and to a subsequent reconciliation and blending of the various cults. Among them is the well-known story of Dakṣa's sacrifice, to which Śiva was not invited. Enraged at the omission, he violently breaks up the sacrifice.........and is pacified by receiving a share."[1] We are told in the *Vārāha-Purāṇa* that the Śaivite scriptures were revealed for the use of those Brāhmaṇas, who on account of their sins were not fit to perfom the sacrifices.

The earliest scriptures of the followers of Śiva consisted of twenty-eight works called *Āgamas.* They were regarded as directly revealed by God himself and were regarded as authoritative as the *Vedas.* We find some later Vaiṣṇava teachers writing commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedānta Sūtras* ; but the main scriptures of the Vaiṣṇavas are the *Pañcarātras*, also known as the *Saṁhitās.* From the eighth century onwards, greater prominence was given to the love of Kṛṣṇa and Gopīs, amongst whom Rādhā came in course of time to be recognised as his most beloved companion. These stories were allegorically interpreted as the divine love of the embodied souls towards their Lord, who assumed human form for the protection of the people.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is an important scripture of Vaiṣṇavism. It does not speak highly of the Brāhmanical religion of sacrifices. The second chapter contains a disparagement of the Vedic mode

1. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. II, p. 193.

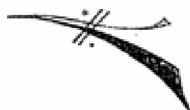
of worship as contrasted to the method inculcated in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* itself. Similarly, we are told in Śaiva scriptures, that the path of the *Vedas* takes a person to heaven only, from where he is born again on the earth, after the termination of the allotted period of enjoyment. Ultimate salvation is attained only by adopting the course laid down in Śaiva religion. These indirect insinuations in both Vaiṣṇavaism and Śaivaism against Vedic religion clearly point to the protestant character of these movements. Of course later on, after a good deal of hesitation extending over a century or so, the Brāhmaṇas accepted these sects as parts of the ancient Vedic tradition and incorporated them into their later religious texts, such as the epics and the *Purāṇas*.

Dr. S. K. Chatterjee says in his article on the Indian Synthesis, "Indian tradition has all along admitted two strands in Indian religion, philosophy and ritual,—the Vedic and the non-Vedic tradition, *i.e.*, the *Nigama* and the *Āgama* respectively. The non-Vedic *Āgama* tradition is that which has come down from times immemorial. It embodies the special teachings of Śiva imparted to Umā, and the Tāntric doctrines and ritual and Yoga ideas and practices come under it. The *Āgama* tradition is non-Aryan in origin, and it is exceedingly likely that is it very largely Dravadian."[1] The *Nigama* tradition stands for the Vedic rituals and Vedic beliefs. The *Āgamas* include

1. *Indo-Asia Culture*, January, 1955.

not only the Śaiva and Tāntric scriptures but the Vaiṣṇava scriptures as well.

These movements began from about the sixth century B.C., from which date the influence of non-Aryan elements began to make itself felt in the evolution of Indian culture. As long as the Vedic religion and ritual remained simple and appealed to the common people, the non-Aryan ritual and ideology continued to occupy a subordinate place. Of course, there was at this time a lot of independent religious thinking, but with the racial intermixture of the Aryans, giving rise to a large number of mixed castes and a closer cohesion, the hitherto neglected non-Aryan ideas came to the forefront and gradually began to influence the people. We shall have more to say about this in the next section.



BOOK III

Vedic Religion becomes Hinduism

CHAPTER I

Causes of Transformation

We shall discuss in this chapter the processes which led to the transformation of Vedic religion into Hinduism, as it is found from the beginning of the Christian era practically down to the present time. The new sects which we have alluded to in the last section were to a large extent responsible for bringing about this change. Buddhism and Jainism were avowedly anti-Vedic. When in the third century B. C., Aśoka adopted Buddhism as the State religion, it naturally received a great impetus, and within a short period, as the result of royal patronage, it spread to all parts of the country and became a popular religion with the masses. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism at first were confined to a restricted area, but emphasising, as they did, the devotional element of religion, they had a great popular appeal, and

ultimately when the Maurya dynasty came to an end, giving place to Hindu supremacy, these two sects succeeded in becoming the rivals of Buddhism in popular favour. Their doctrine of the religious equality of men gave them a further advantage over the Brāhmaṇical religion with its manifold caste distinctions.

The Brāhmaṇas had for long ages been the intellectual leaders of the people. The heads of various states had Brāhmaṇas for their ministers and advisers. The Brāhmaṇa leaders saw the gradually increasing influence of the new religious sects. They also felt that the ascendancy of the Brāhmaṇas could no longer remain unchallenged under their adverse influences. So after a period of anxious suspense and watchfulness, they, it appears, made up their mind to extend their patronage to the new religious systems. It may also be true that some of the enlightened members of the Brāhmaṇa class also began to be sceptical about the usefulness of costly and inhuman sacrifices. In certain portions of the *Brāhmaṇa* literature, the signs of dissatisfaction with the efficacy of sacrifices are clearly visible. But it seems that the priestly classes were more anxious to retain their leadership and ascendancy, than to effect wholesome changes in the current religion. As Sir Charles Elliot says, "The guiding principle of the Brāhmaṇas has always been not so much that they have a particular creed to enforce, as that whatever the creed of India, they must be its ministers."[1]

1. *Buddhism and Hinduism*, Vol. II, p. 191.

A great master mind would have tried to give a more profound meaning to the established religion, at the same time ridding it of all accretions, which had gathered around it. He would have accepted only such elements from non-Aryan sources, as were distinctly of unquestioned value. In this way, the old religion would have continued to hold all its valuable elements, enriched and reinterpreted in the light of later experiences. What actually happened was, that the Brāhmaṇas became nervous, and indiscriminately adopted all sorts of ideas and practices, even those of doubtful value—mass-superstitions and cults, which had no connection with the loftier teaching of the *Upaniṣads* and the ancient Vedic traditions. As long as the caste-system was duly respected, and their superiority remained unchallenged, the Brāhmaṇas readily tolerated and gave sanction to all sorts of beliefs and practices, which seemed to be gaining ground around them.

Buddhism and Jainism were not given recognition to, because they were definitely against the authority of the Brāhmaṇas. It is very interesting to note, that in the Buddhist works, the Brāhmaṇas are described as inferior to the Kṣatriyas. Buddha in one of his discourses says, "Whether one compares women with women or men with men, the Kṣatriyas are superior and the Brāhmaṇas inferior."[1] In the *Jātakas* (V, p. 257) Brāhmaṇas are spoken of as low born, as compared

1. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, Vol. II, p. 65.

with the Kṣatriyas. Similarly the Jainas did not give any importance to the Brāhmaṇa class.

It would be giving a totally wrong picture of the Brāhmaṇa mind, if it were assumed that the Brāhmaṇas of that period thought only in terms of prestige and pecuniary gain. There were undoubtedly many Brāhmaṇas, who were ardent seekers of truth. In the life time of Buddha, the Brāhmaṇas took the liveliest interest in his teachings and many became his followers, and this in spite of the fact, that the new creed went against Vedic theology and the tradition of Brāhmaṇic supremacy. Even the Brāhmaṇa priests allowed Buddha to carry on his propaganda without any opposition, though it was definitely against their accepted creed, and was likely to undermine their influence in society.

Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, which had their own scriptures known as *Āgamas*, were not openly hostile to the Brāhmaṇas and the authority of the *Vedas*. Therefore, it was not difficult to give them a place in the Hindu system. Later on this privilege was extended to most of the beliefs and rituals of the non-Aryans, and their gods and goddesses were admitted into the Hindu pantheon. Thus Hinduism became what it is today, an agglomeration of all sorts of beliefs and superstitions, from the most advanced to the most primitive ; a museum of high and low specimens of religious ideas. This open welcome to all sorts of ideas is sometimes praised in the name of toleration.

Of course we can take pride in the fact, that in the long course of our history, we do not meet with any acts of religious persecution, or efforts to preach our religion to other people under threats of violence. But to allot the same rank and importance to the lofty thoughts of the *Upaniṣads* and the crass supersitions of the wild tribes of jungles and hills is not toleration, but an exhibition of a perverted sense of values. This is what it practically came to in actual practice, in spite of any profession to the contrary. The effect of this point of view was, that instead of raising the lower to the level of the higher, the higher point of view was pulled down to the level of the lower. We find even cultured people among the orthodox Hindus bowing their heads before all kinds of gods and goddesses indiscriminately, and regarding every religious practice as equally a path to God-realisation.

Perhaps the pull of the new religions was too great to be resisted. The leaders might also have been carried off their feet by the attraction of temple worship, as contrasted to the simplicity of sacrificial altars. Whatever may be the motives, which led the wise people of those times to broaden the basis of their religion, the fact remains that the spirit of the ancient Vedic culture was lost, and in its wake came all sorts of new ideas, social customs and superstitions. The worship of idols became the common feature of Hinduism. In the midst of all these changes, however the hegemony of the priestly class remained undis-

turbed. On this point they were not prepared to make any compromise. Formerly they officiated at the sacrifices, and when the sacrifices became practically obsolete in course of time, they became the priests of the temples. Their importance remained unabated, as no religious ceremony could be performed without the agency of the Brāhmaṇas.

We get an idea of these new changes from the great epics, the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*, the *Smṛtis* as well as the *Purāṇas*, which came into existence from the third century onwards.

The *Mahābhārata* describes the great battle fought between the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas, both of them belonging to the tribe of the Bhāratas. In course of time, to the original story were added large sections devoted to Philosophy and Ethics, legends of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects, fables and stories and numerous myths of gods and goddesses. It thus became a great repository of knowledge on diverse matters, accumulated by diverse hands at different periods. This great epic is believed to have attained its present form between the fourth century B. C. and second century A. D. The date of the great battle fought between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas is believed to be about the fifteenth century B.C.

The *Rāmāyana* in its present form must have existed at a much earlier period, as there are numerous references to it and its author Vālmīki in the *Mahābhārata*.

Among the *Dharma Śāstras Manusmṛti* is the oldest and is held in great respect. It is believed to have been composed between 200 B. C. and 200 A. D. Other *Smṛtis* such as *Yājñavalkya, Nārada* etc. were composed later. These *Smṛtis* provide the foundations of Hindu law and custom. The later works on the subject, composed after the sixth century A. D. were mostly imitations or digests of these earlier works.

The *Purāṇas* :—These works have played a great part in the development of Hinduism. In these *Purāṇas* are found descriptions of the various sects of Hinduism, their mythologies and modes of worship, their philosophies and superstitions and various festivals and ceremonies connected with them. The *Purāṇas* are eighteen in number.

It is said that there existed some *Purāṇas* even in the Vedic period long before the Christian era ; but in that period they were texts of *Itihāsa* or history. Some of these *Itihāsas* or narratives are found in the various *Brāhmaṇas.* The existing *Purāṇas* are altogether different, completely revised and modified with a view to incorporate the many new sectarian doctrines which had become popular. They may thus be regarded as a deliberate attempt to bring the theistic religions like Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism within the pale of orthodoxy by combining the new doctrines with a respect for Vedic rituals, customs and beliefs, specially the orthodox ideas of caste and order (*varṇa-āśrama*) which had fallen

into disuse or comparative neglect, partly on account of the rise of new sectarian religions which were all more or less anti-Vedic and anti-Brāhmaṇa in their inception, and partly on account of the large influx of foriegn elements in the Hindu population.

Inter-Racial Fusion

In the *Ṛgveda*, we read of the conflicts between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. "All non-Aryans" says, S. K. Chatterjee, "within the frame-work of Aryan-dominated society which was being developed ....were at first given the general name of Śūdras, and were relegated to a inferior position with considerable disabilities."[1] This happened after the Aryans in the course of their conquests, had succeeded in annexing large territories from the non-Aryan chieftains. Even in the epic period we read of a large belt of non-Aryan kingdoms round about the Kuru Pañcāla region ruled by the Aryan kings. In the epics are mentioned at least five important non-Aryan tribes with whom the Aryans were either in hostile or friendly peaceful relations. They were the Niṣādas, the Nāgas, the Rākṣasas, the Vānaras and Gandharvas. All of them excepting the Niṣādas are described as civilized. In the Buddhist scriptures, the Nāgas are referred to as a cultured race. Many of them were later converted to Buddhism. In *Jātaka* VI, 150, the following description is given of the land of the Nāgas. "Filled with troops of Nāga maidens, gladdened constantly with their sports day and night, abounding with

1. *Indo-Asia Culture*, July, 1954.

garlands and covered with flowers, it shines like lightening in the sky. Filled with food and drink, with dance and songs and instruments of music, with maidens richly attired, it shines with dresses and ornaments."[1]

The Nāgas were regarded as great architects and engineers, and many of the great monuments and buildings are attributed to their skill. They are described as having built very good cities in south India. In the Saṅgam texts, they are spoken of as hardy and warlike people, having curved lips, large bright teeth and a voice like thunder. They lived in north-west India and some of them lived in the South as well.

The Gandharvas were also a civilized race, living in the Himālayan region round the Uttara-kuru. In the *Purāṇas*, the cities of the Gandharvas are referred to as consisting of magnificent buildings. The Gandharvas were great surgeons and were also reputed as highly skilled musicians, just as the Nāgas were known for their skill in architecture.

The Rākṣasas and the Vānaras lived in south India right up to Laṅkā in the extreme south. Laṅkā was the capital of the king of the Rākṣasas, while Kiṣkindhā was the seat of the king of the Vānaras.

Niṣādas were hill tribes with Negro characteristics. They were precursors of the present day aborigines in India.

1. Vishva Nath : *Racial Synthesis in Hindu Culture*, p. 18.

As the Aryans went on with their mission of expansion towards the east and south, they naturally came into conflict with the non-Aryans in possession of those regions. These armed conflicts ended in the subjugation of non-Aryan rulers, or their reduction to the status of allegiance-owing chieftains. The Aryan colonization of new lands could not have been accomplished without a tough resistance on the part of the non-Aryan tribal chiefs. We find account of these armed conflicts right up to the times of the epics. In the *Mahābhārata* there are numerous descriptions of the fights of the Pāṇḍavas against non-Aryan chiefs. The *Rāmāyaṇa* similarly records the fights of Rāma against the Rākṣasas who used to molest the Aryan Ṛṣis engaged in performing sacrifices at various places in the south. We have also accounts of friendly relations between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Guha, the chief of a non-Aryan tribe is shown as being very friendly and helpful to Rāma after he was exiled from Ayodhyā, and the Vānaras under Hanūman and Sugrīva offered their all out help to Rāma in his encounter against Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā. In the war of the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, many non-Aryan chiefs are described as fighting on both sides as allies.

Slater in the *Dravadian element in Indian Culture*, speaks of the three stages of the inter-racial conflict of the Aryans with the non-Aryans. The first stage, as described in the *Ṛgveda* was the stage of slaughter and devastation. At this stage, the cities of the

enemies were razed to the ground; their castles shattered and their wealth forcibly seized by the Aryans. The second stage was marked by wholesale slavery of the conquered peoples. The Aryan kingdoms were established and were sustained by the labours of the non-Aryan peasants, artisans and labourers. At the third stage, we find the Aryan kingdoms fighting against one another or against the Dravadian states or making alliances with them according to the need of the hour. It was an age of intercourse between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The epics take up the thread of the Aryan-non-Aryan relations at this stage.

Intercourse implies inter-marriage and we have in this period numerous instances of inter-marriage not only among the higher castes of the Aryans but also betweet the Aryan castes and the non-Aryans Śūdras. In the *Ṛgvedic* period, there are only a few stray references to admixture of blood, but by the time of the epics, such cases have become numerous. There are many instances in the *Mahābhārata* of such relationships, as for instance the marriage of Śantanu with Satyavatī, the daughter of a fisher-man, of Bhīma with the Rākṣasa-princess Hidimbā, of Arjuna with the Nāga princess Ulūpī, and of Abhimanyu with Uttarā, the daughter of the non-Aryan king Virāṭa.

Of course, the Brāhmaṇas in such a situation as this, made every effort to preserve their racial purity by discouraging mixed unions, but their efforts were not successful. Mixed marriages of both *Anuloma*

and *Pratiloma* variety were a common feature of the day. Even a Śūdra marrying an Aryan woman of Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya or Vaiśya caste was no uncommon thing. As these Śūdras came from the non-Aryan families, some of them were fairly wealthy people or very skilful artisans and craftsmen. Naturally they were not unwelcome for marriage to Aryan women of similar economic status. "The off-springs of all such unions" says Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, "were recognised in both the earlier and the later law books, the *Dharma-Sūtras* and the *Dharma-Śāstras*, in an Aryanising society although different degrees of high and low positions were allotted to them."[1] In the same article the writer says further, "Although mixed unions were held in theoretical disfavour under the lead of the priestly classes, no stigma was attached to them in practical life. In fact inter-caste marriages, particularly after the formation of the mixed castes, were very common within the same economic or social group, throughout Hindu history, right down to pre-British times."

The result was, that a large number of mixed castes came into being, and the colour and the complexion of the people of India underwent a change. In the West-Bengal report for the 1951 census, as many as 209 names of mixed castes and of non-Aryan groups associated with the Hindu social system are given. New castes arose by further admixture among

1. *Indo-Asia Culture*, July, 1954.

the mixed castes already formed. This process went on all through the centuries, resulting in the growth of numerous castes and sub-castes among the Hindus.

Many non-Aryan ruling families were brought within the Aryan society, after the performance of certain ceremonies, and thus arose many new dynasties under the names of Agnikula, Indra-Vaṁśa, Candra-Vaṁśa and Sūrya-Vaṁśa Kṣatriyas. Even the non-Aryan priestly classes were absorbed into the Aryan class of Brāhmaṇas. When in this way, the entry of the intellectual and aristocratic non-Aryans into the Aryan fold became common, there could be no lasting objection to their union with the pure blooded Aryans of the same economic and cultural background living within the same area.

The Aryans were a fair complexioned people. The Brāhmaṇas among them, who perhaps succeeded in preserving their racial purity much longer than was the case with other higher castes, are described by Patañjali in the second century B.C. as tall, fair and blond people; but the frequent inter-marrying between the people belonging to different races resulted, in course of time, in the change of complexion. The Aryans partly as a result of living in warm climate, but mostly on account of miscegenation were, gradually losing their fair colour. The heroes and heroines in the epics are described as being of different complexions. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are dark in colour, Balarāma and Lakṣmaṇa are white-complexioned. Arjuna is sometimes described as white and some-

times as dark. Draupadī was of dark complexion and Sītā's complexion is described as golden yellow. Thus, in the words of Viśva Nātha, "A fairly good idea of the change, that had taken place in the complexion and ethnic features of the Aryans of the age could be formed from the description given of the heroes and heroines in the *Mahābhārata*."[1] There is a similar description of the heroes and heroines of *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Cultural Synthesis

When people inter-mingle socially, their cultural ideas are bound to influence one another. This is what happened in India. The absorption of the intellectual and aristocratic classes of the non-Aryans into the Hindu social and cultural frame-work hastened the process of Aryanization. It was a new kind of racial absorption. While the new comers accepted the superiority of the Brāhmaṇas, the sanctity of the Sanskrit language and the authority of the *Vedas*, the orthodox Brāhmaṇas on their side allowed the Aryanized non-Aryans to keep the worship of their gods and goddesses and the observance of their customs, beliefs, and rituals. In course of time the non-Aryan modes of worship spread among all classes of people, transplanting in a large section of the population, the Vedic sacrifices. The new gods took the place of the old Vedic deities. From this time onward the Indian culture took the form of a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan traditions.

Though their number was gradually diminishing,

1. *Racial Synthesis in Hindu Culture*, p. 92.

there were many people in this period who followed the Vedic mode of worship. They performed sacrifices according to old Vedic traditions. The Vedic religion had also been carried to South India by the zeal of the Vedic missionaries, and it was held in great respect by the people of South India. "There was a wide-spread notion, that the performance of the Yajña and the maintenance of the holy fire were essential to the prosperity of the community."[1] The Brāhmaṇas who performed these sacrifices also took upon themselves the duty of 'perfecting the people' by the free gift of education. The people on their side made every effort to keep the Brāhmaṇas in comfort and above want.

With the gradual spread of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism in North and South India, the old religion practically ceased to exist, except in a small number of families. This transformation, however, could not have taken place automatically as the result of the working of social forces alone. The religious leaders of the times must have set on it the seal of their approval. The question can be asked, why did they give their sanction to all types of beliefs and modes of worship which they found prevalent around them—the worship of spirits and demons, trees and mountains, snakes and reptiles, and belief in charms and spells, along with the higher things found amongst the non-Aryans. It was as if Christianity were to recognise the superstitions, the quaint

1. S. K. Ayangar: *Some Contributions of South India to Indian Culture*, p. 107.

customs and animism prevailing among the wild tribes of Africa, just for the doubtful advantage of getting them into the Christian fold and calling them by name of Christians.

It is not possible now after so many centuries to assess the real motives, which led to this new development. Love of power sometimes makes people do strange things. It is an extremely strong emotion. A person or a community may go to any length in order to achieve power or to retain power already possessed.

The Brāhmaṇas exercised a great influence on the people. All strata of society, including the kings and the nobility held them in great respect, at first on account of their good qualities and purity of life, and later, on account of the religious hold which they had come to possess over the daily life of the people. It is, therefore, quite possible that when they realised that the new sects were growing in popular favour, they put themselves at their head, after arranging a sort of compromise between the new creeds and the old Vedic tradition. Though the old religion practically disappeared, the Brāmaṇas have continued up to the present day to be the priests in all the temples, the heads of the religious monastaries and the custodians of the religious welfare of the Hindus.

It would be an over-simplification to trace the rise of new Hinduism to the love of power on the part of the Brāhmaṇas. Some new factors in the

political and social life of the people appeared, and threw a challenge to the spiritual leaders of the country. After the fall of the Maurya dynasty in third century B. C., the whole empire was broken into small states and there was no strong central government. The result was that the Greeks and then the hordes of Śakas, Pārthians, Yueh-chi and others poured into the country and established kingdoms in the North and West of India. These political upheavals naturally brought great evils in the country. There were chaos, disunity and disruption all around, and the Brāhmaṇas solved the problem of creating unity in a vast mass of heterogeneous population and divergent faiths in a way of their own. They could not absorb Buddhism and Jainism, but they took from them their salient features such as the spirit of non-violence, of austerity and renunciation. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism were adopted as different forms of ancient Brāhmaṇic religion. The non-Aryan beliefs and rituals were given a place of honour, and the priests, who officiated in Dravadian temples were elevated to the rank of Brāhmaṇas. The non-Aryan chiefs and nobles were admitted to the class of Kṣatriyas. The same treatment was meted out to the foriegners who came later on. They were absorbed within a short space of time into Hinduism. The Brāhmaṇas also in this period turned their attention to the masses. Formerly Brāhmaṇism was an exclusive religion. The masses had been entirely neglected so they naturally turned to Buddhism and to other religious sects for the satisfaction of their spiritual

needs. Now the ancient stories, legends and ballads, loved by the masses were rewritten, and over-laid with a good deal of moral and religious matter for their benefit. Efforts were made to teach religion by means of easy stories, dialogues and "the ideal characters" of the epics. The knowledge which had hitherto remained the sole possession of a small minority, was thus brought to the door of the common man.

The Hindu leaders of this age deserve credit for bringing about the Hinduisation of practically the whole of India. Sanskrit became the sacred language of all Indians, and was understood in all parts of the country. The important places of pilgrimage were located in all places all over the country and people travelled to the north, south, east and west to visit these places. They thus came into contact with one another, and exchanged views on all subjects of importance. Thus a common culture was evolved and its essential values came to be recognised throughout the length and breadth of the country, in spite of the diversity of beliefs and modes of worship, prevalent among the people.

The Brāhmaṇa priestly classes made it a point to preserve the continuity of the ancient Vedic traditions and save it from dying out. On all important occasions, such as marriage, at least the semblance of Yajña was kept up and Vedic verses were recited. The authority of the *Vedas* was maintained even though in every-day worship of the

people, new scriptures had practically taken the place of Vedic *Saṁhitās*. In the daily prayers the recitation of the Vedic verses was ordained as a sacred duty.

During this period, *i.e.* from the beginning of the Christian era down to the end of the 7th century, Hinduism assumed a form, which has remained more or less the same practically upto modern times. According to D. S. Sarma, "Hinduism by the end of 300 A.D. had already developed almost all the main features and characteristics, with which we are familiar today, *i.e.* the conception of the impersonal Brahma and the personal Īśvara, the supreme authority of the *Veda*, the law of Karma and rebirth, the formulas of Varṇa-Āśrama Dharma and Dharma-Artha-Kāma-Mokṣa, the threefold path of Karmā, Bhakti and Jñāna, the doctrines of Tri-mūrti and Avatāra, the ritual of image and temple worship, the sectarian beliefs and practices of the Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas and Śāktas, faith in pilgrimages, the sanctity of the cow, etc. Subsequent ages only added a few details here and there and systematized the ideals, that lay scattered before."[1]

We shall take up in the remaining part of this section, the salient elements of neo-Hinduism, in order to get, as far as possible, a complete picture of the change, which took place in the Hindu culture of this period.

1. *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, p. 29.



CHAPTER II

Popular Religion

Hinduism is unique in so far as it includes a diversity of beliefs and modes of worship. There are among the Hindus, people who worship a personal god as well as those who meditate on the impersonal Brahma. The religion of the vast bulk of Hindu population consists of the worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu and of some other gods and goddesses Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism are both theistic creeds believing in a single, all pervading infinite, eternal godhead called Śiva and Visṇu respectively. Śiva has no incarnation and his material emblem is the Liṅga symbol, though images in human form are also found now and then in Śiva temples. The most noteworthy development which took place in Vaiṣṇavism in this period was the formulation of the doctrine of Avatāra or incarnation. In the *Upaniṣads*, the Brahma is described both as immanent and transcendent. It is present in all beings in different degrees. In fact all beings are its manifestations, man being the most

remarkable manifestation in the whole world process. There appear in special periods men endowed with highest spiritual powers. They are the saviours of mankind. This idea gave birth in its turn to the concept of incarnation, according to which God Himself descends into these men. The power of God may even descend into animals, hence among the ten Avatāras, three are animals, the fourth is half man and half lion, the rest being all human. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are the most popular incarnations of Viṣṇu and are worshipped in most of the Hindu temples in all parts of India. The worship of Śiva comes next to that of Viṣṇu.

Among Hindus there are also found worshippers of Sūrya, Kālī and other deities. There are people, who worship saints and Ṛṣis or even demons, ghosts and spirits. The worship of serpents and other animals, of plants like Tulsī and Pīpala, of rivers and mountains and other objects is not uncommon. On certain auspicious days, every craftsman worships the implements of his trade. It appears that some Hindus would be prepared to worship anything under the heaven, if it has an element of either fearsomeness or beneficence in it.

It should not be difficult to understand this multiplicity of worship, after what we have said in a previous chapter of the wide scale admission of Dravadians and other non-Aryans into the Hindu socio-religious system. There is no doubt whatsoever that the worship of trees and serpents, of demons and

spirits, was prevalent among the non-Aryans before they entered into the Hindu fold with their beliefs and rituals. Professor Macdonnel writes, "There is reason to believe that when the Aryans spread over India, the land of serpents, they found the cult diffused among the aborigins and borrowed it from them.[1]"

But it must be kept clearly in mind that though to all appearance, modern Hinduism contains numerous beliefs and practices, but essentially the majority of Hindus are either the worshippers of Śiva or of Viṣṇu. "Under superficial differences," says Sir Charles Elliot "the main lines of thought are less numerous than they seem to be at first sight, and they tend to converge"[2] In course of time, however, exuberant mythology grew up around the principal gods, Śiva and Viṣṇu, endowing them with celestial residences, wives and offsprings, attendants and servants, and thereby giving a most fantastic form to the popular religion of the masses.

A most important characteristic of this period is the introduction of image-worship among the majority of Hindus. The sacrificial altar gave place to the temple. The worship of images was common among the Dravidians and other non-Aryans. When the costly sacrifices became unpopular among the large mass of the Aryans, they turned in a large number to the non-Aryans modes of worship, among which the

1. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 111.
2. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. II, p. 135.

worship of images happened to be prominent. This form of worship is known as *pūjā* as contrasted to the *homa* or *havana* of the Vedic Aryans. By means of special ceremonies, the spirit of god is called into the image, which thenceforward becomes impregnated with the divine spirit and becomes the visible representation of the deity himself. The divinity supposed to be present in the image, is regaled with incense, offerings of flowers, fruits, and with dance and music. In the case of divinities like Durgā or Kālī, animals may also be sacrificed, and the blood of the victim is either placed in a cup before the image or is smeared on it. If the image is made only for a temporary purpose, the spirit called in it may be released by the performance of another rite and then it is not believed to possess any spiritual potency and is changed into a mere clay or stone. According to S. K. Chaterjee, "this ritual is essentially un-Vedic and non-Aryan."

Image-worship is common among Hindus and also among catholic Christians. This form of worship is quite compatible with monotheistic belief. Different people may resort to different modes of worship or to more than one mode of worship at different times, such as image-worship, or recital of prayers and religious songs, meditation, *japa* etc. Some eminent men in India, such as Vivekānanda and Paramahaṁsa Rāmakṛṣṇa and before them Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja have used this method of worship along with meditation. For men who are pure and noble, every method can yield good results.

Many evils crept into temple worship in course of time, which have had a debasing influence on Hindu religion. Some religious teachers have felt that an image cannot convey to the worshipper an adequate idea of the infinity and all-pervasiveness of God. The verbal symbols, on the other hand, are more elastic and are, therefore, better instruments of divine worship than a material object. Prayers and meditation are adopted to the thinking section of mankind, and are accessible to every one at all time. It is not necessary to go to a temple or a mosque for the worship of God.

If a religion, however, is to be judged by its practical fruits, the followers of iconoclastic religions have not shown themselves in any way morally or spiritually superior to the people who make use of icons or idols for purposes of worship. Not only do their lives show no greater purity or goodness, they have in fact brought, in their mistaken missionary zeal, indescribable miseries to the non-believing part of mankind. Hinduism, on its part, gives freedom to every individual to worship God in the way which suits his temperament.

As already remarked, Śiva and Viṣṇu are regarded by their worshippers as the names of one infinite supreme universal being. Śaivism and Vaṣṇavism are thus both of them monotheistic creeds, which gave birth to systematic philosophical doctrines known as Śaiva-siddhānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita systems of later times. But very soon a number of

gods came to be associated with Śiva and Viṣṇu, thus converting the theistic creeds of these sects into virtually polytheistic religions. Professor Hari Dass Bhattācārya writes, "The social instinct of man has never taken kindly to the idea of a solitary personal god, and has ever tried to furnish him with associates as in polytheism or with subordinate companions or personified qualities like angels and Yazatas, most of whom were originally indepedent deities of the old polytheism or gods of other tribes, now incorporated within the monotheistic religious community."[1]

Thus to Viṣṇu and Śiva were attached numerous gods and goddesses, some of them being of non-Aryan origin. Lakṣmī or Śrī was recognised as the spouse of Viṣṇu and Umā, Pārvatī, Kālī, Durgā were the different names of the consort of Śiva, to whom were born Gaṇeśa and Skanda as sons. Śiva is said to be attended by a large retinue of Gaṇas. It was in this period that the idea of Avatāras or of Viṣṇu descending into animal or human forms for the redemption of the world was born. This idea has exercised the greatest fascination on the minds of orthodox Hindus in all later times. We have also in this period especially after the fifth century A.D. the concept of Śakti or divine power being made the basis of the cult of Śāktism. Śakti was worshipped in the personified form of mother goddess and this cult gave rise to the religious literature known as *Tantras*,

1. *The Foundations of Living Faiths*, Vol. I, p. 44.

"There is no doubt" says, D. S. Sharma, "that Śāktism is the result of the Aryanisation on a vast scale of non-Aryan cults and beliefs of earlier ages."[1] In all the later developments of Hinduism to which we shall refer in the succeeding chapters, it should be always kept in mind, that both the elements of Indian life, the Aryan and non-Aryan, have collaborated and sometimes have been so intimately blended together, that it is no longer possible to separate them from each other.

In this way, once the process had started, the love of the concrete and the myth-making tendency of man led to the creation of many gods and goddesses, and of many stories, legends and myths. which were collected in the *Purāṇas.* In fact, some of these legends and myths were already current among the Aryans and the non-Aryans. They were adopted and retold in Sanskrit language in the *Purāṇas.* Along with them came images, temples, pilgrimages, festivals, fasts and vigils and other well known paraphernalia of *Paurānika* Hinduism.

We thus find that while a small section of the Hindus made use of prayers or meditation in their worship of God, the majority of them satisfied their religious need by bowing before idols in temples. These temples are to be found everywhere and in sacred places such as Banāras, one comes across hundreds of temples, where pilgrims from various parts of India collect in thousands to have a *darśana*

1. *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, p. 32.

of their favourite deities. In Banāras, the number of important temples is over two thousand. Smaller shrines are much more numerous. The largest and most magnificient temples are, however, found in south India, the well known temples at Tanjore, Madura and Rāmeśvaram being perhaps the most spectacular and majestic of all.

It is not easy to assess completely the value of temple worship, pilgrimages and other religious ceremonies associated with Hinduism. Sometimes one gets the impression that Hinduism is a two-faced religious system, one face turned towards the few of deeply religious natures, while the other face looks at the vast mass of pious and simple-minded worshippers. The religious aspirants of the first category read high class religious literature and make use of meditation, *japa*, devotional songs, prayers etc. as modes of daily worship. The latter class of people are regaled with mythical stories and legends described in the *Purāṇas*, and are treated to all sorts of superstitious beliefs and practices. The worship of idols is described as specially meant for such religiously immature people. The spectacular and impressive ceremonies of temple worship appeal to the masses, and they are abundantly supplied to them. It would, however, be wrong to suppose, that it is only the uneducated people, who go to the temples. Highly educated lawyers, professors and others are equally to be found among the temple-goers. An educated person need not be well versed in religion also. As far as religion is concerned, he may be in

the same condition as an illiterate person, holding the belief that in matters of religion, blind devotion is the main thing and reasoning an impediment rather than a help.

It appears, that the leaders of neo-Hinduism put a very low estimate on the intelligence and religious sense of the common people. They thought that the worship of idols would be enough for them, as it was difficult for them to conceive the Infinite, Omnipresent. All-knowing God by means of thought processes as expressed in words. The insufficiency of the idols-worship was felt at various times by saints and prophets. Kabīra, Nānaka, Dādu, and many other saints in the North and South of India have expressed their dis-satisfaction with it in pretty strong language. The idols are mostly of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa or of gods like Śiva, all of them endowed with human qualities. Idolatory, by equating God with a human being, however, exalted he might be, leads to a narrowing down of the idea of the Infinite. The words, as verbal symbols are undoubtedly the best means of bringing before one's mind the different aspects of the ultimate reality. Any number of words can be joined together, in all sorts of combinations, and made the means of conveying the deeper and otherwise inexpressible ideas. The value of prayers and devotional songs for religious purposes can be as much appreciated by the masses as by learned people, and they definitely give a better idea of divinity than an idol.

Neo-Hinduism, not only prescribed idol-worship for the masses; it also created a special religious literature known as the *Purāṇas*, in which highly imaginative and mythical accounts of the geneology and doings of different gods and goddesses are given. Gods are represented like human beings, with their quarrels, amours and jealousies. Sometimes the description of the love episodes of gods goes to the length of indecency. The pictures of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in amorous poses cannot be said to have a wholesome effect on the spectators. Very few persons can, on seeing the picture or the image conceive the allegorical meaning, which is attempted to be conveyed through them. Very few painters can succeed in conveying through images and pictures the profound idea of spirituality and religion. Generally the effect is of the nature of a sensual suggestion, the very opposite of what it is intended to convey. Professor Hari Dāsa Bhattācārya says again "Nor is allegorical interpretation of dubious doctrines, and shady practices always a safe procedure, specially when religious matters are taught through unbecoming symbols. Debasing thoughts and practices have a tendency to be taken in their utter literalness in total disregard of their esoteric philosophy and ethics"[1] This applies as much to sensual images and pictures as to many debasing rites and ceremonies, mentioned in some of the *Tantras* of this period.

It is very difficult to believe that the *Purāṇas* have done any service to the religious-minded people

1. *The Foundations of Living Faith*, Vol. I, p. 30.

of India by giving such descriptions of gods and goddesses. The tragedy of the situation is that common people do not take these accounts as mythical or imaginative ; but as true descriptions of really existing divine beings. This naturally gives them a distorted and morally harmful idea of what God is supposed to be. Instead of having an elevating effect on their character, these descriptions have a tendency to exercise a depressing influence on their minds.

"Educationists" says Aldous Huxley, "mould the character of their pupils by providing them with literary models to be imitated in real life. Such models to be mythical, historical or fictional." The mythical models provided by the *Purāṇas* have woefully fallen short of their purposes. The gods of the *Purāṇas* are not the right type of models to be imitated by the people for their moral education. Their baneful effects would have been still greater, if they had not been counteracted by the pure and ennobling influences widely disseminated by the historical models set before the people in the great epics of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. As D. S. Sharmā so beautifully writes, "Ideal types of character, representing all stages of life were clothed in epic grandeur and set before the nation. We have in the epics not only the ideal Sanyāsīs or hermits, but also the ideal king, the chaste wife, the loyal brother, the disciplined student, the virtuous citizen and the faithful servant. It is difficult to exaggerate the educative influence, exerted on the national mind by such concrete examples as Rāma, Lakṣamaṇa, Sītā,

Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma. These characters have moulded the Hindu society as Homeric characters moulded the Hellenic society. Thus the abstract truths of the *Upaniṣads* became vital forces, holding together a great civilization, when they were incarnated in epic types."[1] This is not to deny, that there are many beautiful things in the *Purāṇas*, leaving out all portions of dubious value. It would be well worth to spread the truth among common people, that heaven and hell, and the god and goddesses of the *Purāṇas* are mere imaginative creations to impart certain truths and do not respresent real beings.

Indian mythology is rich and beautiful, an extraordinary product of richly endowed imagination. Most of the myths and stories are meant to impart lessons on conjugal faithfulness and truth and purity of life. The story of Hariścandra is a perennial source of inspiration to the Hindus of all times and so are many other stories. Most of them are pure myths, some are a mixture of myth and reality, but they are all beautiful and imaginative renderings of great moral ideas.

The difficulty with popular Hinduism is, that the common people, as a rule, believe in the truth of these myths and stories. In the West nobody believes now in Greek gods and goddesses; so, it is possible to derive the utmost enjoyment from their mythical adventures. We can similarly take a deep pleasure in our own mythology, if we only adopt the

1. *The Renissance of Hinduism*, p. 25.

right attitude towards it. "If people believed in the factual content of these stories, the whole thing was absurd and ridiculous, but as soon as one ceased believing in them, they appeared in a new light, a new beauty, a wonderful flowering of a richly endowed imagination full of lesson."[1]

Popular Hinduism also errs in making religion too easy for a common man. One has simply to take the name of Rāma or Hari a number of times, to earn for himself or herself the right of heavenly abode. There are many stories in the *Purāṇas* like the one according to which a man, a few moments before his death called his son, whose name was Nārāyaṇa, and just for taking the name of Nārāyaṇa in his dying moments, he was transported to heaven. We are told in the *Upaniṣads* that walking in the way of Dharma is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor. And here we are told that a mere uninternational taking of god's name wafts a dying person of heaven. The repetition of such stories day in and day out for so many centuries has had a softening effect on the character of Hindus, and has given a very unreal and fantastic conception of devotion and religion. The element of moral effort and resistance necessary for higher life has been very lightly treated. In such an atmosphere of religion, the duties and activities of life lose their interest and emphasis is laid on meaningless though picturesque ceremonies and rituals. In this connection one may mention the miraculous effects

1. Jawahar Lal Nehru ; *The Discovery of India*, p. 56.

associated with the making of pilgrimages to sacred places and bathing in sacred rivers. Many simple-folk virtually believe that if they go on a pilgrimage to the cave of Amaranātha in Kāśmīra, three times, they would obtain salvation. There are many other similar superstitions, which are accepted at their face value by common people. They believe that if they take their bath at the confluence of Gaṅgā and Yamunā near Allāhābād on a certain auspicious day, they would attain heaven, and when that day arrives, millions of people at considerable expense and inconvenience flock to that place from all parts of India. What have religion and devotion got to do with bathing in a river, and yet this great untruth has continued to be perpetrated during all these centuries.

This is the form which popular Hinduism took in the beginning of Christian era. It has more or less remained the same ever since, and no great effort seems to have been made to educate the people in right conceptions of religion by the religious leaders of Hindus till we come to modern times. Not that there was an absence of profound religious conceptions and ways of spiritual attainment. There were plenty of them and we shall refer to them at the proper place. But the masses were not thought fit to be instructed in those ideas and so they were regaled with silly childish things. It was a great injustice done to the common people by allowing them to remain grovelling in dark superstitions and puerile religious conceptions. "It is unfortunate" says Rādhākṛṣṇan, "that

the majority of the Hindus acquiesce in admittedly unsatisfactory conceptions of God. In the name of toleration, we have carefully protected superstitious rites and customs. It is necessary for the Hindu leaders to hold aloft the highest conception of God and to bring about an improvement in the conceptions of the common people, as well as, in the religious places which are visited by millions of Hindus everyday."

It seems that later Buddhism copied most of the features of popular Hinduism. According to Mahāyāna Buddhism, "The purity of Buddha is so great that the worship of the exalted one is sufficient for the attainment of Nirvāṇa, and that one already acquires endless merit by merely walking round a stupa and worshipping it by means of floral offerings." Earlier Buddhism laid great emphasis on moral effort as a necessary part of the eightfold path for the attainment of Nirvāṇa, and the same emphasis we find in the early *Upaniṣads*. In popular Hinduism, singing of hymns of praise (*stotras*) to Śiva and Viṣṇu, going through certain ceremonies and rituals, fasts, and pilgrimages to sacred places were recommended as easy means of attaining salvation.



CHAPTR III

Development of Caste in Hinduism

There was no caste in the old Vedic times, especially, in the *Ṛgvedic* society. The people were, of course, divided into a number of classes, each class performing its own function, and, thereby, contributing to the well-being of the community as a whole. Within the same family, the members sometimes plied different vocations, and instances of people changing their profession were not rare, as shown in the section on Vedic culture.

The process of the gradual hardening of caste system had already begun in the *Sūtra* period. just preceding the Buddhistic period. We have it on the evidence of the *Śāṅkhāyana-Śrautasūtra*, that the power of the Brāhmaṇas was increasing. They were exempted from paying taxes, and while they could become kings on occasions, the Kṣatriyas could hardly become priests. The caste distinctions even encroached upon the domain of civil and criminal law. The rates of fine and interest were graded

according to castes, and for the same offence, a Śūdra was given a much heavier punishment as compared to what was awarded to a member of a higher caste. The Brāhmaṇa enjoyed the largest number of legal and social privileges. It was not so in the *Ṛgvedic* times. We also see in the *Sūtra* period at about 600 B.C. the beginning of the pernicious custom of untouchability, namely, the belief that impurity or defilement can be communicated to a member of a higher caste, by his contact with a member of the lowest caste. This is apparent in the laws laid down in the *Dharma-Sūtras* of Vasiṣṭha, Gautama, and Āpastamba.

But the caste system had not become rigid, as was the case in the Moslem and the British periods. Intermarriages went on in spite of Brāhmaṇical disapprobation. Many foreign elements, that came to India after the fall of the Maurya dynasty were all absorbed into the Hindu society. Not only the civilized Greeks but even the uncivilized tribes of Central Asia were taken into the Hindu fold and completely merged.

We find from the Buddhist Pālī texts, that besides the established castes and their numerous sub-castes, there were also, socially below them, what were ranked as *hīna-jāti* or low castes. They followed the low crafts and mostly belonged to aboriginal tribes. In some texts, these people, lying outside the pale of Hindu society, are also described as Melakkha (*mleccha*). They included Caṇḍālas, Venas, Nisādas, Rathakāras etc.

They did the meanest work and could walk during the day only after wearing some distinguishing marks on their persons. We have an evidence of the existence of these low castes, and the treatment meted out to them, in the accounts of the Chinese travellers, Fahein and Houesn-Tsang, who visited India in the fifth and seventh centuries respectively. The literature of the Gupta period also bears witness to these things. The *hīna-jātis* lived on the outskirts of the village. As a matter of fact, in the Gupta period, and even before that, different quarters of a town or village were allotted to the members of the four castes. It is clear both from the *Bṛhat-Saṁhitā* of Varāhamihira, and the *Artha-Śāstra* of Kauṭilya.

We thus find, that by the end of the Gupta period, in the fifth century A.D. the caste system, with its four main castes and numerous sub-castes, had acquired a permanent character. It was, however, not a static thing, for new sub-castes arose as the result of "migration, fusion or sub-division." Old sub-castes sometimes lost their status, and new sub-castes took their place. With these minor variations, however, caste had become an established institution and has remained so through all the succeeding centuries.

As already stated, there was no caste system among the early Aryans. There is no mention of hereditary castes in the *Ṛgveda*. How did it arise among the Aryans later on, in the *Brāhmaṇa* and the *Sūtra* period ? Slater expresses the view that caste

was already existent among the non-Aryans and it was borrowed by the Aryans from them, and there was accordingly to him, a priest-magician class or caste among the Dravidians, which commanded a great prestige and respect from the rest of the people. Such a class, apparently, did not exist among the Aryans, but it is now one of the most important features of Hinduism. Though scholars are not agreed on this point, there is enough evidence to show that in *Ṛgvedic* times, there was, as a rule, no special class entrusted with the task of perfoming sacrifices. Oldham in his book, *The Sun and the Serpent* says on the authority of *Mahābhārata*, that Śakra the chief priest of the Asuras (Dravidians) divided himself by the power of asceticism, and became the spiritual guide of both the Daityas (Dravidians) and the Devas (Aryans). In ancient Sanskrit literature the terms Asuras, Daityas etc. are used in reference to the Dravidian non-Aryans. It is quite possible that the existence of a special class of priests among the non-Aryans gave a clue to the Brāhmaṇas of the Aryan society to transform themselves into a similar class. This view is further strengthened by the fact that "notoriously the caste system is much stronger, much more elaborate, and plays a much larger part in social life in South India than in North India; and it reaches its highest development in that part of India which is most effectively cut off from land-invasions from the North, the narrow strip of land between the Western

Ghāts and the Arabian Sea. This fact is by itself sufficient to prove, that caste is of Dravidian rather than of Aryan origin."[1]

Whatever may be the origin of caste system, it is clear that its chief feature is the ascendency of the Brāhmaṇa over the rest of the people. He is the law-giver, the minister and adviser of the king, and the religious preceptor of the people. His ministrations are indispensable for the welfare of an individual here and hereafter. In a society where religion and superstition play an important part, the authority of the priestly class becomes supreme. The Brāhmaṇas themselves were very zealous to maintain their special powers and privileges. There are references to the fact of Brāhmaṇa superiority in numerous places in ancient texts, their pretensions to superiority sometimes going to a ridiculous length. Dr. Ambedkar gives the following summary of the privileges claimed by Brāhmaṇas, from Kane's *Dharma-Śāstras*, Vol. II, pp. 138-153 :—

"The Brāhmaṇa must be acknowledged to be the Guru of all *Varṇas* by the mere fact of his birth.

The Brāhmaṇa is not subject to the authority of the king. The king was the ruler of all except the Brāhmaṇas.

The Brāhmaṇa is exempted from (1) whipping, (2) fetters being put upon him, (3) the imposition of fine, (4) exile, (5) censure and (6) abandonment.

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1. Quoted by Slater in his book, *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture*, p. 52.

A *Śrotriya* (a Brāhmaṇa well versed in the *Vedas*) is free from taxes.

A Brāhmaṇa is entitled to claim the whole of the treasure if he found it. If the king found it, he must give half to the Brāhmaṇa.

The property of a Brāhmaṇa dying without a heir shall not go to the king, but shall be distributed among the *Śrotriya* or Brāhmaṇas.

The king meeting a Brāhmaṇa on the road must give way to the Brāhmaṇa.

The Brāhmaṇa must be saluted first.

The person of a Brāhmaṇa is sacred. No death sentence could be passed against a Brāhmaṇa even if he is guilty of murder.

For certain offences, a Brāhmaṇa must receive a lesser punishment than members of other classes, and so on."[1]

Further privileges assigned to Brāhmaṇas according to Kane are "Free access of the houses of other people for the purpose of begging alms ; the right to collect fuel, flowers, water and the like without its being regarded as theft, and to converse with other men's wives being restrained (in such conversations) by others, and the right to cross rivers without paying any fare for the ferry-boat and to be conveyed (to the other bank) before other people."[1] It is not possible to know how far these privileges were actually carried

1. *Who were S'ūdras*, p. 240.

into practice ; but there is no doubt, that the Brāhmaṇas formed the apex of the caste pyramid. The *Kṣatriyas* paid their respects to them on account of their learning and religious leadership, and the Brāhmaṇas in their turn gave their moral, support to the king and the nobility. Apart from the Brāhmaṇas and the aristocracy, the common people did not count. They formed the bulk of the population, and were completely subservient to the two upper classes. The Vaiśyas were engaged in agriculture and commercial pursuits and were, of course, treated better than the Śūdras, who were the hardest hit in the caste-ridden social economy.

The caste system, ever since its inception, has never operated on the basis of social justice. It is rather an, aristocratic organisation, in which the Śūdras did not have, till recently any chance to rise in the social scale. Honest labour does not command any respect among the higher classes, It has all along been treated with contempt. It is really strange that all the vocations, without which no healthy society is possible, were relegated to the Śūdras, as they were held to be beneath the dignity of higher classes. Weavers, masons, architects, potters, carpenters, smiths, workers in leather, barbers, and many other useful workers were put in the category of Sūdras. In *Yājñavalkya-Smṛti* most of these vocations are looked upon as inferior and are put along with the professions of prostitutes, gamblers, thieves and drunkards.

The Śūdras, who plied these vocations were consigned to a very inferior position in the *Dharma-Śāstras*. A Sūdra was denied the right to read or to listen to the Vedic mantras. "If he listens intentionally to the *Vedas*, his ears will be filled with tin or lac. If he recites, his tongue shall be cut off."[1] A Śūdra was looked upon as impure, and, therefore, a sacrifice could not be performed in his presence.[2] If any body killed a Śūdra, he was to pay much lesser compensation than if he killed any member of the higher caste.

Any member of a higher caste could keep a Śūdra woman as a concubine, but if any Śūdra made love to a man of a higher caste, he deserved corporeal punishment (*Manu-Smṛti* VIII 366). According to *Āpastamba-Dharmasūtra* (II, 27, 8-10) if a man of a higher caste commits adultery with a Śūdra woman, he shall be banished. If, however, a Śūdra commits adultery with a woman of a higher caste, he shall suffer capital punishment.

A Śūdra was born to serve the higher classes and could not during his life-time aspire to rise to a higher social status. He had no rights whatsoever as compared to the members of the higher classes. He was practically debarred from receiving knowledge or from keeping property or arms and was to remain the servant of the higher classes for his whole life.

1. *Gautama Dharma-Sūtra*, XX., 4-5.
2. *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, III. I. I. 10.

Why were these stringent rules framed for the Śūdras? The account which follows is not to be taken as a justification for the inequities of the caste system. It is only an effort to understand the psychological and social motives underlying the treatment, meted out to the Śūdras. It is to be remembered that the pernicious effects of the system were mainly confined to the Śūdras. They were the people who suffered most of all. The explanation, perhaps, lies in the social conditions by which the Aryans were surrounded, after their period of expansion and settlement in a large part of the country. The Śūdras, as we already know, came from the erst-while hostile non-Aryans. A large part of the population of the territories under the Aryan rulers consisted of the non-Aryans, who acknowledged the suzerainty of the Aryans. In course of time, most of the intellectual and military elements among them were absorbed into the higher classes of the Aryans, and given the status of Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas. The rest, constituting the bulk of non-Aryan population, became labourers following various vocations, referred to previously. Here was a situation, in which a small number of Aryan masters lived amongst a very large population of subjugated non-Aryans, who performed all sorts of labour for them, and were practically their slaves. Thus arose the ideal of a gentleman; namely, that a member of a higher caste could only function as a man of learning or a soldier. It was beneath his dignity to engage in manual labour of

any kind. The same thing happened in Greece and Rome, where there was a very large slave population. As Aldous Huxley says, "the ideal of the scholar and the gentleman, in European countries, originated among the slave-owning philosophers of Athens and Ionia" (Ends and Means under Chapter on Education).

In early ages, the development of culture was very much due to the leisure provided to the learned classes by the servile toil of the teeming slave population. In early days where one man's labour produced just a little more than was necessary to sustain him and his children, leisure was possible only if their was a large class condemned to slave labour, so that the cultured minority could peacefully carry on their intellectual activities. "We must admit that slavery and social injustice have in the past served a useful purpose in the development of civilization." (B. Russell)

This is by the way. The Aryan masters surrounded as they were by a numerous class of Śūdras, could not help entertaining a constant fear of rebellion from people, who were their erst-while enemies. In course of time, they also grew accustomed to the comforts of slave labour. This, coupled with the initial feeling of distrust, led them to adopt strict measures in order to keep the Śūdras in perpetual subjection.

This seems to be the only plausible explanation

for the harsh and oppressive social laws enacted against the Śūdras. It would be wrong to suppose that the Brāhmaṇas and other members of the higher classes were naturally of a cruel disposition. To many of them, this treatment might have been highly distasteful. Sympathy with suffering is a natural reaction , but an average human being happens to be so constituted, that his sympathies mostly remain confined to members of his own group. There are very few people, who can rise above class or group considerations, and extend their sympathies to the entire human race. It becomes all the more difficult, when the element of fear is constantly present. Moreover, as already said, a certain social organisation grew up, in which the higher classes had at their disposal, an overwhelmingly large class of Śūdras, who were always at their bidding, and in every way ministered to their wants and comforts. This very comfortable social organisation, at least to the higher classes, could only continue, if the Śūdras were kept in ignorance and in state of abject dependence. It was not a just social order, but it was very convenient and it has worked without any friction for centuries. The law of Karma was also invoked to give a philosophical explanation for this unjust state of things, and it proved so useful that even philosophers, who otherwise preached the unity of self, did not find it difficult to justify the existing social order.

And even the Śūdras, as well as the lowest class of the untouchables were content with their lot, and

did their work in a spirit of service and ungrudging obedience. The law of Karma assured them, that they had got what they deserved and, therefore, they had no ground for complaint. On the whole, the Śūdras were treated well as long as they did their work to the general satisfaction of their masters, and did not overstep the limits of their particular vocations. The relations in villages and towns between members of the higher classes and the Śūdras were generally cordial. There was no tendency to be cruel or hard on the one side, and to be ambitious and discontented on the other.

The Negroes are an alien race in America. In spite of its democratic set-up and broad sympathies, the United States of America has not been able to assimilate them. There are many harsh discriminatory laws against the Negroes and there is no social equality between the Negros and their white compatriots.

In Western countries the movement against slavery began very late and it was only in the eighteenth century that it was abolished. While many kind-hearted people were against slavery on moral grounds, its actual abolition came as a consequence of Industrial Revolution. It was felt that slavery was no longer economically useful and, therefore, there was no point in keeping it any longer. Of course, humanitarian and moral considerations, also played their part in anti-slavery agitation.

In India, foriegn domination lasted right up to the twentieth century. The advanced ideas of the West, the factory methods of production, and the urge for social and religious reform appeared rather late on the horizon of India. On account of the foriegn rule extending for so many centuries, there was no special urge and also no political machinery for changing the undesirable institutions prevailing in Hindu society. With the dawn of freedom, the old order is rapidly changing into a better state of things.



CHAPTER IV

Deterioration in the Position of Women

In the Vedic period, as we have seen, women held a high position in society. The girls were married at a grown-up age, and they could exercise their choice in the selection of their husbands. They had freedom of movement, and could attend fairs and festivals, tournaments and learned assemblies, without any obstruction. Education was held as desirable for a girl as for a boy, and she too, like the boy had to pass through a period of *Brahmacarya.* Many lady-scholars made very valuable contributions to the learning of that period, and a number of them had the privilege to be the seers of Vedic hymns. There is no doubt whatsoever, that right up to the age of the early *Upaniṣads,* women were treated with respect and their position in the community was very satisfactory indeed.

From about 400 B. C. a gradual deterioration in the position of women began to take place. We first hear a faint murmer to the effect that the marriages

of the girls should not be postponed long after the onset of puberty. The *Dharma-Sūtras,* which were mostly composed between 400 B.C. and 100 A. D. advise the parents to marry their daughters as soon as they attain the age of puberty. Some of them prescribe the maximum period of three years after puberty, and others such as *Gautama* and *Viṣṇu Sūtras* advise the celebration of marriage within three weeks after the signs of puberty have made their appearance. There were some writers during this period who advised marriages to take place even before puberty. The conflict of opinion came to an end by about 100 A. D. when there was a general agreement among the writers of *Dharma-Śāstras* in favour of pre-puberty marriages. From about 200 A.D. onwards, pre-puberty marriage became common in Hindu society.

It is not easy to point out the causes, which led to the worsening of the position of women from about the beginning of the Christian era. We cannot say that the Aryans borrowed the custom of early marriage from their non-Aryan neighbours. We know, as a matter of fact, that in Malabar in South India, where non-Aryan manners and customs remained influential even after the people had adopted the social and religious system of the Aryans, post-puberty marriages have remained common even up to present times. The matriarchal order of society in Malabar was mostly responsible for the resistance offered to

the newly-instituted custom of child marriage in the rest of the country.

The custom of early marriage was adopted by the Brāhmaṇas in the beginning. It did not become popular among the Kṣatriyas for a long time. In the Sanskrit dramas, written during the period of 300-1200 A. D. the heroines are all described as grown-up at the time of marriage, and the heroines were chiefly of Kṣatriya aristocratic families. Early marriages were soon adopted by the lower classes also.

Dr. Altekar in his book[1] suggests that degeneration in the position of women began after the conquest of the non-Aryans and their incorporation, in a large number into the Aryan social structure, mostly as the Śūdra class. A large servile population thus became available for all sorts of manual labour. This naturally led to a life of ease and luxury among the Aryan masters. Intermarriages between the Aryans and non-Aryans also became common, after the two peoples had begun to live together peacefully. It was not unusual for the influential members of Brāhmaṇa and Kṣatriya classes to marry besides an Aryan wife, a number of non-Aryan wives also. There is no mention in *Ṛgveda* of Aryan Śūdra marriages. The Aryan male married the Aryan woman. The Aryan wife looked after all domestic work and was thus a very useful and respected member of the family. But when non-Aryan woman began to be introduced

1. *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, pp. 416-17.

into the family, the position of the Aryan wife naturally became worsened, while at the same time, the large number of slaves made her unnecessary for the daily tasks of the household. Her services in the family were no longer indispensable, as in previous times. She lost her importance as a useful member of the family, and became a mere ornamental figure, living a life of luxury along with her co-wives. This was especially true in the case of higher circles. These two factors, the life of luxury on the one hand, and the prevalence of polygamy on the other, might have led in some cases to looseness of morals. Polygamy naturally has a bad moral effect, especially on a neglected and discontented wife, and the effect is intensified, when men and women lead a life of luxury and comfortable ease. Laxity of morals in higher families gradually leads to a general deterioration in the tone of social life as a whole. It is, therefore, no wonder, if we find the *Dharma-Sūtras* of this period laying a great stress on the need of absolute chastity, especially before marriage. At first they insisted that a girl should be married off as soon as she attained puberty ; but gradually they adopted the position, that in order to be above all doubt, marriage should take place before the age of puberty. The economic question did not cause any anxiety in that age. The people were economically quite well off, and moreover the joint family system prevailing in the Aryan society, made it easy for a boy to be married long before he could become an earning member of the

family. His parents, elder brothers and other members of the joint family could easily provide for his child bride as for himself during the, intervening period.

Apart from all this, the life of freedom and liberty which women in general enjoyed throughout the Vedic period might have led, in the case of some unmarried girls especially those, who had no natural guardians or protectors, to a deterioration in morals. The *Ṛgveda* refers to, this matter in a number of verses (I, 124,7 ; IV, 5,5 ; VIII, 25,5). There are even references to clandestine love on the part of married women (I, 24, 3 ; IX, 32, 5 ; IX, 38, 4 ; IX, 56, 3). We also come across such remarks as 'woman's love is always fickle' (X, 95,15). But it does not mean that laxity was so common, that a drastic treatment was necessary. The fact, that there are occasional references to moral laxity shows, that there was a need for reform. The reform was attempted in the age of the *Sūtras* and in the following age ; but in their effort to ensure absolute chastity, the law givers of the age took away all freedom from women, lowered the age of marriage, and reduced woman to a state of complete dependence on man. The remedy was worse than the disease. A. C. Dass says, "woman-hood was sacrificed at the altar of supposed social convenience and purity." The degeneration of women led to a degeneration all round. In Western countries, people sometimes complain of laxity in sex relations, as the result of freedom and equality enjoyed by modern women. Of

course, a way has to be found to restore the dignity and purity of sex relations, but there is no likelihood that the Western society would go to the length of taking away all freedom from women in the interest of sexual purity. This was the great mistake which the ancient Indian legislators committed in the post-Vedic age.

The gradual stiffening of the caste system, after the beginning of Christian era, might have had something to do with the lowering of the marriage age. As the number of sub-castes went on increasing, and intermarriages between sub-castes came to be looked upon with disfavour, and in course of time forbidden, the circle of choice for the prospective husband of one's daughter became considerably narrowed down, and so the parents were naturally anxious to have their daughter married, as early as possible, to a suitable bridegroom. We find parents even in the present times getting anxious, when their daughter attains puberty, about selecting a life-partner for her before it is too late. The development of caste system and banning of intermarriages might have played an important part in lending support to the institution of child marriage. Of course this was the danger, in the system of early marriage, of a girl becoming a widow even while she was still a child; but as this did not happen frequently, and when it happened it was regarded as a decree of fate, this objection did not stand in the way.

The institution of early marriage did not leave any period for the education of girls. As a matter of fact, we find in this period, female education being very much discouraged. When down to 3rd century B. C., girls could remain unmarried up to the age of 16 or even beyond, there was a period of eight or ten years for them to receive instruction in the subjects of the day. In those days, the education of girls was held essential in order to secure a good match for them (*Atharvaveda* XI, 5,18).

Two classes of women students are mentioned in the early period, *Brahma-vādinīs*, who were life-long students of sacred literature, and the *Sadyovadhūs* who received education till their marriage. There is also mention in this period of women teachers, who were known as *Upādhyāyā* or *Upādhyāyī* to distinguish them from the wives of teachers, who were known as *Upādhyāyānī*. There must have been a large number of these women teachers, otherwise there was no need to invent a special name for them. In addition to literary subjects, the girls were also given training in fine art, such as music, dancing, painting and some of them were given military training also. Megasthenese writes about women body-guards accompanying Candra Gupta Maurya, whenever he went out on a hunting expedition.

All this naturally underwent a change, when child marriages became the order of the day. It is strange to find the Smṛti-kāras of later age making light of women's education. In course of time, it

became a disqualification for a woman to profess to be educated. It seems, the so-called wise people of this age were so much concerned with the question of the bodily purity of a young wife, that they did not attach the slightest importance to her intellectual or artistic development. It was enough, if she bore a male child to her husband and thus enabled him to fulfil the obligation of *pitṛ-ṛṇa* enjoined upon him by the religious scriptures of the day. Her main function was to produce childern and to wait upon the pleasures of her lord.

A Vedic wife was inseparable from her husband in performing sacrifices and other religious functions. It was now no longer held necessary for a wife to be present at a sacrifice along with her husband. By the beginning of Christian era the right of *Upanayana* or wearing the sacred thread was taken away from her. Her marriage at about the age of eight was considered as equivalent to the *Upanayana* ceremony. This ceremony in the Vedic period marked the beginning of education in the case of both boys and girls. When the education of girls was no longer held necessary, the *Upanayana* ceremony also became redundant. And there came a time, when a woman was not even allowed to recite Vedic verses, and thus from a religious point of view, her position became analogous to that of a Śūdra. This is what we find in the case of the majority of the women of the country. Of course, girls of high families, especially the Kṣatriya families and those

living in hermitages, where they could remain unmarried till puberty, did sometimes receive education from their near relatives or regular teachers.

Widows : The condition of widows also worsened in this period. In Vedic period, girls were married at a grown-up age. The number of widows was therefore small. A childless widow, could according to the custom of the age, live as the wife of her dead husband's younger brother. In *Atharvaveda*, there is a reference to the custom of widow-remarriage. Of course, we do not come across many references to support the custom of widow re-marriage in the ancient Vedic literature. There is, however, a reference in Manu to King Vena as having forced the widows to remarry. The name of Vena occurs in the *Ṛgveda* as the ancestor of Pṛthu. Therefore, it is quite possible, that he lived in the *Ṛgvedic* times, and might have advocated the custom of widow remarriage. Moreover, as is well known, the custom of *Niyoga* was also prevalent in Vedic times. A widow was allowed to get as many as three sons by *Niyoga*. As it was not likely, that three sons would always be born, or born one after the other without a daughter intervening, *Niyoga* practically amounted to a life-long companionship or marriage.

When child marriages came into vogue, the number of child widows also increased. So Parāśara and some other Smṛti-kāras laid down the law, that child widows could be remarried. Widow remarriage

must have occurred fairly frequently in this period, because the *Sūtras* sanction remarriage even to a woman, whose husband has remained untraced for a certain period. According to Vasiṣṭha, even a Brāhmaṇa lady with living children could remarry, if her husband did not return to her after an absence of five years. In a Jātaka story, a woman, when given a choice between a husband, a son and a brother, chose the brother, on the plea, that while the husband or the son could be easily got again, a brother could not be so obtained.

So the custom of widow remarriage was in vogue in the *Sūtra* period, though it was gradually coming into disrepute by the beginning of Christian era. The opposition to widow remarriage grew stronger after 200 A.D. Manu, Viṣṇu and Nārada all deprecate the idea of widow remarriage. But even then it seems, the custom continued for some time more. We are told that the great Emperor Candra Gupta Vikramāditya, who reigned from 375 A.D. to 414 A.D., married the widow of his elder brother.

From about 600 A.D., the writers of *Smṛtis* began to strongly condemn the marriage of widows, though they were yet humane enough to allow the remarriage of child widows. But from 1000 A.D., the remarriage of even the child widows came to be banned. Thus the custom of widow remarriage almost completely disappeared from about 1100 A.D. This, of, course only happened in the higher castes, which formed only about twenty percent of the total population.

The custom has, however, continued among the lower castes, who form the vast majority of the Hindus, right down to the present times.

The total prohibition of widow remarriage in higher castes led to some very serious consequences. The custom of Satī became general. Many young widows preferred to burn themselves on the pyre of their dead husbands, rather than to face the ordeal of a long dreary life of Hindu widowhood. In most cases it was a voluntarily-imposed death, though sometimes women were forced by their relations to immolate themselves along with their dead husbands. The percentage of Satī was high among the Rājapūta families. Probably, it was as high as twenty five percent among the Rājapūtas, but as far as the rest of the people were concerned, not more than one widow in a thousand, became Satī even in the period of its greatest vogue.

Some of the living widows, who could not live the hard life of chastity, were led to live as concubines of rich people. It is related in Vātsyāyana's *Kāma-Sūtra*, that such a young woman, would offer herself as a concubine to a well-to-do person. When rejected by one person, she would approach another person for the same purpose. In the Muslim period, a large number of widows embraced the Muslim faith for no other reason than that they could easily get remarried after conversion. If the Smṛti-kāras could have

foreseen the disastrous consequences of their unfortunate decision, they might have thought twice before laying down such a rule.

It is not easy to understand, what led the Hindu law-givers to make such stringent rules against widows. Was it as some writers have suggested, the result of an ascetic view of life ? But in that case the legislators should have laid the same restrictions on men also. But no such thing happened. A man could remarry immediately after the death of his wife, and even during the life-time of his first wife. There was no restriction whatsoever upon his vagrant sexual cravings. The whole thing appears too irrational to admit of any plausible explanation. It was, perhaps, a case of psychological obsession with the idea of complete purity. In the eyes of these people, even a child widow was a contaminated human being, and she was to expiate for it with life-long abstinence and austere living. They perhaps thought that widow remarriage could not be completely stopped, unless the ban was made universally applicable to all, including the child widows. The law-givers themselves must have now and then undergone a great suffering as a consequence of this injunction. Some of their daughters also must have become widows, while they were still children, thus causing a great anguish to their parents ; but they possibly ascribed it to fate and bore their suffering without grumbling. This blind spot

prevented them from taking into account the long-range social consequences of this iniquitous legislation or the unspeakable misery caused to its victims. It is really strange, how sometimes a perverted sense of values brings in its train, disastrous consequences to all concerned.



CHAPTER V

Great Achievements

Literature and Science

We have discussed in previous chapters a number of retrogressive tendencies in Hinduism. It is now time to describe some of its great achievements. There is, in this period, a many-sided out-burst of literary, religious, scientific and philosophical activity. We have already briefly alluded to the religious literature of this age; the two epics, the *Dharma-Śāstras,* and the large number of *Purāṇas* and *Tantras* which have had, for better or worse a tremendous influence on the later development of Hinduism. But this period, right from the beginning of Christian era to the end of Gupta period, and even for sometime later, also made many rich contributions to Drama, Poetry, Prose, and the Sciences of Grammar, Mathematics, Medicine, Astronomy, Chemistry etc. It also saw the development of Indian philosophical systems, and higher religious conceptions.

Aśvaghoṣa and Bhāsa are the two great dramatists

and poets, who flourished in the 1st century A. D. and the 3rd century A. D. respectively. *Mṛcchakaṭika* or Clay-cart is said to have been written probably in the 1st and 2nd centuries B.C. by King Śūdraka. They are followed, in succeeding centuries by Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, and many others, whose fame as great writers of plays and poems has not diminished with the passing of years.

The plays and poems of Kālidāsa have received great ovation and appreciation at the hands of some of the greatest literary artists of the West. Goethe, the great German writer was simply enraptured, when he read the drama of *Śakuntalā*. The reputation of Bhavabhūti is only second to that of Kālidāsa. He also, like Kālidāsa, wrote only three plays of which *Mālatīmādhava* is best known to Western scholars. "It is impossible" says Wilson, "to conceive language so beautifully musical or so magnificently grand as that of the verses of Bhavabhūti and Kālidāsa."

Pandit Jawahar Lal quotes in *The Discovery of India*, p. 131 the comments of the dramatic critic, Joseph Ward Krutch on Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭika*, an English version of which was staged in New York in 1924, "Here if anywhere, the spectator will be able to see a genuine example of that pure art-theatre of which theorists talk, and here too, he will be led to meditate upon real wisdom of the East, which lies not in esoteric doctrine, but in a tenderness far deeper and truer than that of the traditional Christianity, which has been so thoroughly corrupted by the

hard righteousness of Hebraism......... Such a play can be produced only by a civilization, which has reached stability. When a civilization has thought its way through all the problems it faces, it must come to rest upon something calm and naive like this........... Nowhere in our European past do we find, this side of the classics, a work more completely civilised."

Indian drama had its origin on the soil of India, and goes back to very ancient times. There is evidence to show, that plays where acted in India as early as the time of Aśoka in the third century B. C. "It is now generally admitted that the Indian theatre was entirely independent in its origin, in the ideas which governed it, and in its development. Its earliest beginnings can be traced back to the hymns and dialogues of the *Ṛgveda*, which have a certain romantic character. There are references to Nāṭaka or drama in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. It began to take shape in the songs and music and the dance of the Kṛṣṇa-legends."[1]

The fables of ancient India known as *Pañcatantra* and *Hitopadeśa* have made their name throughout the civilized world, and have inspired innumerable stories and fairy tales, written in the later period by Western writers. *Pañchatantra* is really a book on *Nīti* or *Nīti-Śāstra* whose object is to impart instruction on domestic, social and political duties by means of stories, in which the animals are the speakers. These

1. *The Discovery of India*, p. 125.

fables as well as those of *Hitopadeśa* are supposed to have been narrated by a learned Brāhmaṇa named Viṣṇu Sarmā for the moral edification of some young princes, who had been leading dissolute, idle lives. and were a source of worry and distraction to their royal father. *Pañcatantra* has been "translated into all the principal languages of the world, ancient and modern including Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, French, Dutch and even Icelandic."[1]

Pañcatantra is generally acknowledged to be the best collection of animal stories in the world, and is highly spoken of by many Western writers. "The fables of animals," says W. H. Hunter, "familiar to the Western world from the time of Aesop downwards, had their original home in India............The most ancient animal fables in India are the nursery stories of England and America."[2] The short stories were followed by longer and more elaborate stories by great masters like Daṇḍin, Subandhu and Bāṇa. Bāṇa wrote a sort of novel known as *Kādambarī* in the seventh century. Many other tales and stories came to be written at later times. There is a larger collection of tales called *Kathāsarit-Sāgara* by Somadeva. But it was compiled at a later age, *i.e.* towards the end of eleventh century. *Daśakumāra-Carita*, a series of tales in prose was written by Daṇḍin at about the same time.

1. Sisir Kumar Mitra, quoted by Nanak Chand in *The Wisdom of India*, p 81.

2. *Ibid*., p. 83.

The *Nāṭya-Śāstra* of Bharata is a very important work on dramaturgy and poetics, and is recognised as a great Sanskrit classic on the subject even to-day. It gives a brilliant exposition of the essentials of drama, its plot, charactristics and the emotions which it aims at arousing in the spectators. It also describes other relevant matters, such as the gestures made by actors to heighten the dramatic effect, the dress which they should wear, their mode of delivery and so on. *Nāṭya-Śāstra* made a deep study of the art of dramatic representation, and gave a very high rank to it, calling it the fifth Veda, on account of its great importance in the life of the people.

Grammar and Political Science

The science of Grammar reached a high standard of perfection even before the dawn of Christian era, at the hands of Pāṇini, who flourished as early as fifth century B.C. and Patañjali, who wrote his famous, *Mahābhāṣya*, a critical commentary on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* in the second century B.C. There did not appear at a later stage, any other grammarian of the status of either Pāṇini or Patañjali, the great creative architects of Sanskrit grammar for all times to come.

Kauṭilya wrote his famous *Artha-Śāstra* on the science of politics in the third century B.C. It contains references to earlier authoritative works on the subject; but as they are not available, *Artha-Śāstra* is the earliest extant work on political science. It occupies a supreme position in its field, and though

it is the earliest known treatise on the subject, no other work of later times has been able to surpass it, or even approach its greatness.

Medicine

Caraka and *Suśruta* are the two most well-known works on medicine, which have not lost their importance even in modern times. The Āyurvedic system of medicine is entirely based on these works. The available texts of *Caraka-Saṁhitā* is said to have been revised by a Kāśmīri scholar in the 9th century A.D.

The Āyurveda is based on scientific principles; on observation and research, as well as on the intutions of ancient sages of this science; and though it survives at the present time as the science and art of medicine, it was originally developed in a number of specialized branches besides the branch of medicine, such as "Surgery and Mid-wifery (*Śalya-Tantra*), treatment of Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat (*Śālākya-Tantra*), Psycho-therapy (*Bhūta-Vidyā*), Pediatrics (*Kaumāra-Bhṛtya*), Toxicology (*Agada-Tantra*), the Science and Art of restoring health in old age (*Rasāyana-Tantra*) and Sexual Rejuvenation (*Vājīkaraṇa-Tantra*)."[1]

It thus appears, that Medicine was a most developed science in ancient India and was characterized by the spirit of research and assimilation from all available sources. New and foreign drugs were freely

1. Gananatha Sen: *The Cultural Heritage of India*, III, p. 411.

used in Āyurvedic preparations. We do not usually come across this spirit of assimilation among the modern Āyurvedic physicians. "The British Pharmacopacia has assimilated nearly one hundred and fifty Indigeneous drugs ; but how many valuable Western drugs have been assimilated by Āyurvedists."[1] According to *Caraka*, "whatever leads to cure is the right remedy." This is the spirit to be imbibed by all practitioners of this noble art.

It is really a matter of surprise and also of pride to know, that the Indian scientists had made some wonderful discoveries, more than two thousand years ago. They were well acquainted with the phenomenon of the Circulation of Blood. We have it in the *Caraka Saṁhitā* that "From the great centre (the heart) emanate the vessels, carrying blood into all parts of the body, the element which nourishes the life of all animals and without which life would be extinct. It is that element, which goes to nourish the foetus in utero, and which flowing into its body returns to the mother's heart."[2] When Harvey's so called discovery of Circulation of Blood in the 17th century was published, it came as a complete surprise to the medical men of that age, so much so that he "was condemned and hooted out of society for his discovery."

The dissection of human body was also a part of education in Medicine, as is clear from the following

1. *Ibid.*, 413.
2. Quoted by Gananatha Sen, *Ibid.*, under Ch. XXX, p. 414.

quotation from *Suśruta*. "Therefore whoever wishes to get a clear idea of *Śalya* (Surgery) must prepare the corpse in the proper way, and see by careful dissection every part of the body, in order that he may have definite and doubtless knowledge."[1] The kings of Arabia sent scholars to India for the study of Medicine and Pharmacology. They also engaged Hindu scholars to come to Baghdad, "made them the chief physicians of their hospitals and ordered them to translate from Sanskrit into Arabic, books on Medicine, Pharmacology, Toxicology, Philosophy, Astrology and other subjects."[2]

Chemistry

The medical science of ancient times received a great impetus by the discovery of the medicinal properties of various mineral substances, by the chemist-physicians of that period. These new discoveries won a great reputation in the Muslim and Christian world, and the Indian works of Medicine were translated in Arabic and from Arabic in a number of European languages. These physicians were, as Sir P. C. Ray points out in his work of *Hindu Chemistry*, the originators of Chemistry in Ancient India. Speaking of the great progress made by Chemistry in *Rasāyana-Śāstra*, Alberuni, the great Muslim scholar who lived in India from 1017 to 1030 A. D. says, "They call it *Rasāyana*........... It means an art which is restricted to certain

1. *Ibid.*, p. 414.
2. Quoted by N. R. Dhar in *Cultural Heritage*, III, p. 446.

operations, drugs, compounds, and medicines, most of which are taken from plants. Its principles restored the health of those, who were ill beyond hope, and gave back youth to fading old age."

Chemistry in that age was closely allied to Alchemy and Metallurgy. A most notable feature of Indian Medicine was the use of metallic preparations, especially those of mercury and iron for medical purposes. The great Buddhist scientist, Nāgārjuna, is said to have been the first to make use of the black sulphide of mercury in medicine. He is also said to have discovered the chemical processes of distillation and calcination. Alberuni writes of him as follows, "A famous representative of this art (Alchemy) was Nāgārjuna, a native of the fort Daihak near Soma Nātha. He excelled in it and composed a book, which contains the substance of the whole literature on this subject and is very rare. He lived nearly a hundred years before our time."[1] Heuen-Tsang, who stayed in India from 629 A. D. onwards also speaks of the great skill of Nāgārjuna as a chemist. This great scientist must, therefore, have lived in the seventh century and possibly earlier.

Patañjali, the author of *Mahābhāṣya*, and the most reputed grammarian next to Pāṇini was also a great Alchemist, and had made a special study of the science of iron. He lived in the second century B. C.

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1. Quoted in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, III, p. 447.

The greatness of this achievement will be apparent from the fact, that while the Indian physicians were making a free use of such powerful drugs as arsenic, iron and mercury in the seventh century, the medical men of Europe could not return to recommend these drugs for internal use even till the seventeenth century.

It thus seems that Chemistry in earlier centuries was much more advanced in India than in other countries.

Astronomy and Mathematics

Astronomy was the subject, regularly taught in all ancient universities in India. It was already a fairly advanced subject in Vedic times, especially in the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*. Sacrifices were an essential part of Vedic religion, and some of them had to be performed in different seasons of the year. The knowledge of Astronomy helped the priests to determine the exact time for their commencement and termination. The seasons begin and end according to the position of solstices and equinoxes, and it, therefore, became necessary to know when the sun reached these different positions.

It soon became an advanced science. Eclipses and other important natural phenomena began to be predicted with exactness. A very accurate calender was prepared, which is in use even now. The knowledge of Astronomy also proved of immense use to the sea-going people of the age. It is really very strange that man could acquire at a very early period

the knowledge of distant stars, but he has not got any reliable knowledge about himself even up to the present time.

Astrology has been closely associated with astronomy from very early times. Man is naturally interested in his own destiny and it is no wonder, if the constellation of stars at the time of his birth was supposed to have a determining influence upon the future events of his life. Astrology, though it has no scientific basis, is as popular to-day as at any previous time, and wonderful predictions are sometimes ascribed to it even by men of reputed scholarship.

Mathematics

It is now universally admitted, that the foundations of Mathematics were first laid in India. Even in the Vedic period, the *Gaṇita* (Mathematics) included Astronomy, Arithmetic and Algebra. Geometry belonged then to a different group of sciences known as *Kalpa*. We have already indicated the reasons, which led the Vedic Aryans to take interest in Astronomy. They were interested in Geometry also for the same reason. Every sacrifice had to be made on an altar of a prescribed size and it was believed that any deviation from the prescribed shape and size would rob the sacrifice of its intended objective. They, therefore, took great pains in the preparation of the sacrificial altar. This gave an impetus to geometrical thinking, and it led to the discovery of the science of Geometry. The science

was called *Śulba*, and in it "the Vedic Hindus solved propositions about the construction of various rectilinear figures, combination, transformation and application of areas, mensuration of areas and volumes, squaring of the circles and vice versa and about similar figures."[1] Baudhāyana in 800 B.C. enunciated the theorem of the square of the diagonal as in words meant that, "The square described on the diagonal of a rectangle has an area equal to the sum of the areas of the squares described on its two sides."[2] This theorem was of the greatest importance, because of its various applications, in ancient India.

The discovery of the ten numerals including the zero sign, so that all numbers could be expressed by these ten symbols, each symbol receiving a value of position as well as an absolute value, was hailed with great acclamation by the scientists of the world. La-place a reputed scientist of France wrote about this discovery, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, as "a profound and important idea, which appears so simple to us now, that we ignore its true merit, but its very simplicity, the great ease, which it has lent to all computations, puts our Arithmetic in the first rank of useful inventions, and we shall appreciate the grandeur of this achievement when we remember, that it even escaped the genius of Archimedes and Apollonius, two of the greatest men,

1. B. B. Datta: *Cultural Heritage of India*, III, p. 384.
2. *Ibid*., p. 384.

produced by antiquity."[1] Geometry made great progress in India, but it flourished no less in Greece and Alexandria. In Arithmetic and Algebra, however, India stood unrivalled. We do not know the names of the Indian inventors of the ten numerals, the zero sign and the decimal place value system, but whoever they were, they did the greatest service to science and Mathematics for all time to come. Before this invention, even elementary calculations required the services of an expert, while now even a child can make these calculations easily. The knowledge of numbers is the most potent instrument used by all sciences in their work of arriving at exact measurable conclusions. When viewed in this light, "the achievements of the unknown Hindu" says Dantzeg, "who sometimes in the first centuries of our era, discovered the principle of decimal position assume the importance of a world-event."[2]

The discovery of zero and the decimal place-value system made possible the rapid progress in Arithmetic and Algebra, so that a number of new processes soon appeared, and this momentum first imparted to these sciences in India, has gone on increasing from age to age.

From India, a number of scholars went to Baghdad during the reign of Khalif-Al-Mansur, and took with them works on Mathematics and Astronomy. They

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1. Quoted by Nehru in *The Discovery of India*, p. 180.
2. Quoted by Hogben in *Mathematics for the Millions*.

were translated into Arabic and then, as Baghdad in those days was a great centre of learning, to which came scholars from Greece and other countries, the knowledge of Indian Mathematics through Arabic translations spread all over the cultured areas in Europe and elsewhere.

Universities in Ancient India

The great advances in science and medicine and other branches of knowledge, could only have been possible through the existence of great centres of learning in the country ; and as a matter of fact there were great teaching institutions, to which students came in thousands from all parts of the country and even from outside India. We get an idea of these ancient seats of learning from Buddhistic literature. The University of Taxila existed as a famous seat of learning near Peshawar even in the seventh century B.C. Though there were taught all branches of knowledge, Medicine and Science were the specialities of Taxila, and students flocked to it from all parts of India and from Central Asia and Afghanistan. It is said that the Taxila University was the meeting ground of the Greek and Indian philosophers, as well as the scholars from Egypt and Babylon. Pāṇini the famous grammarian of the 5th-century B.C. as well as the renowned Physician Jīvaka were the students of Taxila University. By the time Fahein came to India in the fifth century A.D it had lost its importance.

The other famous seat of learning, the magnificent ruins of which have been excavated at a few miles

from Patna, was the Nālanda University. It was a Budhhistic University, but the Brāhmaṇical scriptures and systems of philosophy were also taught there. When Huien-Tsang came to India in the seventh century A.D. it was a most flourishing residential institution, Christmas Humphreys speaks of this University as famous, "From the second to the ninth century, Nālanda was one of the greatest Universities in India and received the unbounded admiration of those shrewd and critical observers, the Chinese pilgrims, Huien-Tsang and I-Tsing, who successively spent many years at the University in the seventh century......according to the former, the residents at one time amounted to ten thousand men, of whom, eight thousand five hundred were students, and the rest teachers......Students came from Japan, Korea, Mongolia, China and Tartary, as well as from the whole of India, and chose from the hundred lectures delivered everyday, whatever they required. The library must have been one of the finest in the world, while the teachers at any one time included the first brains in India," (*Buddhism*, p. 54).

There existed also some other Universities, such as Vallaboha in Kāṭhiawār and Vikramaśilā near Bhāgalpur in Bihār. Banāras and Kāśmīra were described as great centres of learning by Alberuni in the 12th century A.D.



CHAPTER VI

Great Achievements

Philosophy and higher Religion

We have already referred to some of the profound conceptions, discovered by the *Upaniṣadic* sages of ancient times. These *Upaniṣads* are as fresh to-day as they were at the time of their composition. Out of them have grown many doctrines and ideas, which form the distinctive marks of Hinduism. These ideas are more or less shared in common by different philosophical systems, and in order to understand Hinduism, it is necessary to have a knowledge of these fundamental ideas.

Reality and the World-process

The first fundamental doctrine of Hinduism concerns the existence of the spiritual principle or Ātmā. Ātmā is eternal ; it has no beginning and no end. Ātmā is understood in the sense of both the

supreme soul or Paramātmā as well as the individual soul or Jīvātmā.

All the orthodox systems of Indian philosophy, *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya-Yoga, Mīmāṁsā* and *Vedānta* accept the eternal existence of the spiritual principle in both these forms. *Sāṅkhya* tries to account for the whole world-process without positing any supreme soul, but this lacuna is made good by *Yoga*, which may be regarded as complimentary to the *Sāṅkhya* system. According to *Sāṅkhya*, there is an inherent tendency in the realm of Prakṛti, which guides its development along the prescribed lines. *Yoga*, which accepts in their entirety the theoretical doctrines of *Sāṅkhya*, finds it difficult to account for the order and harmony of the universe without assuming the existence of an intelligent all-powerful being or Īśvara. Īśvara is also accepted in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system as the orginator and sustainer of the cosmos. This is very clearly brought out in the later works, such as *Tarka-Saṅgraha* and *Kusumāñjali*.

The *Mīmāṁsā* system does not disbelieve in God, but according to its tenents belief in God is not necessary to explain the world-process. The world undergoes a change every moment, but it has always existed, without a beginning. Moreover, Karma is automatically followed by its fruit, and, therefore, no external agency is necessary for this purpose.

We should, however, keep it in mind that *Sāṅkhya* proper does not make any positive denial of God, but

simply states that God is not capable of being logically proved. Beginning with Prakṛti as the root of all existence, it traces the various stages of its development, just as a modern scientist would describe the evolution of the world-process in terms of matter and energy, without importing the idea of God, which has no place in the scientific system. *Sāṅkhya* similarly does not deny God, but it does not find it necessary to assume its existence as a factor in the scientific construction of the world-process.

Mīmāṁsā, really speaking, is not a philosophical system at all. It is only a systematic exposition of the basis of Vedic ritualism. Its main function is to lay down the canons for the correct interpretation of the ritual of the *Veda*. The underlying idea was that the correct performance of the sacrifice would lead to the satisfaction of all desires. God is not denied ; but it is not necessary to the system.

We should further know, that *Sāṅkhya* and *Mīmāṁsā* as well as *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* profess their faith in the authority of the *Vedas*. That in itself should set at rest any doubt regarding the theistical character of these systems.

Vedānta is the most popular of the philosophical systems of Hinduism. It will not be wrong to say, that more than ninety percent of thoughtful Hindus are the followers of *Vedānta* in one form or another. The whole fabric of Vaiṣṇavism is based upon the

thought-system of *Vedānta*, and it inspires Śaiva and other devotional sects as well. It is thus the most important of all the six systems and has the greatest affinity to the *Upaniṣads*. Moreover, all the important points of *Mīmāṁsā* and *Sāṅkhya*, such as the epistemological theories of *Mīmāṁsā*, and the cosmology and psychology of *Sāṅkhya* has been appropriated by *Vedānta*. The very first Sūtra of Bādarāyaṇa introduces the reader to the main subject of the system. It is Brahma-jijñāsā or the desire to know Brahma, the supreme reality. In the second Sūtra, we are told that Brahma is that from which the whole world comes into being. He is the cause of its creation, sustenance and final dissolution. The Sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa gave rise, in course of time, to a number of commentaries, which, in their turn, led to the founding of Advaita, Viśiṣṭa-Advaita and Dvaita schools of *Vedānta* philosophy. We thus find that belief in the spiritual basis of the world is a cardinal faith shared by almost all the followers of Hinduism.

The God of Hinduism is not a transcendental creator, who keeps aloof from the world after having brought it into being. He is immanent in every happening and in every object of the world, but he is not exhausted by the totality of the world-phenomena. He is both imminent and trascendent. God is present in all things, but though not to an equal degree. "He is more fully revealed in the organic, more fully in the conscious than in the unconscious,

more in man than in lower animals and more in good man than in the evil. There are divine potentialities even in the worst of men." (Rādhākṛṣnan)

The Multiplicity of Soul

Along with the belief in the supreme Soul, there is also the belief in the eternal character of individual souls. Consciousness is a category, which cannot be accounted for in terms of matter or energy. The body in all its parts, from the head down to the toe of the foot, is made up of matter, and of nothing else than matter. The emergence of consciousness is a great miracle, superimposed so to speak, on the complicated bodily mechanism. Though it appears in the accompaniment of bodily processes, there is no reason to suppose, that it is causally related to them. All the philosophical systems of Hinduism accept the souls or units of consciousness as separate from the material bodies, with which they are associated. According to *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system, souls are eternal and distinct from the body and the mind. They are also infinite in number. The vital bodily processes such as breathing, assimilation of food etc. are also regarded as signs of the presence of the soul. The soul in its essential nature is ubiquitous and all pervasive ; though it is limited to particular perceptions and ideas on account of the atomic nature of the mind, which is associated with each soul.

The *Sāñkhya-Yoga* system also believes in the infinite number of eternal souls. A soul is without

parts or qualities. It is only a knower; or a mere spectator of the enchanting and everchanging scenes of nature; though as a result of ignorance it forgets its real nature and becomes involved in the dance of Prakṛti. The union with Prakṛti is the cause of bondage for the soul, from which it can liberate itself by the removal of ignorance about itself.

While according to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* view, the soul actually acquires the qualities of knowledge, feeling and volition, when joined to mind, the *Sāṅkhyan* soul is ever without any quality. The various mental processes, which appear to be the qualities of the soul are really the operations of material Antaḥ-karaṇa or mind reflected in the soul. The union of soul and Prakṛti is compared in the *Sāṅkhya* system, to a lame man riding on the shoulder of a blind man for observing the phenomena of nature, which the blind Prakṛti cannot do itself.

The *Vedānta* or *Brahma-Sūtras* have been commented upon in a number of ways. According to Śaṅkara, empirically there is an infinity of souls, but looked at it from the point of view of reality, they are merely an appearance on the bosom of the Absolute, a mere illusion like that of a snake in the rope, or like the reflected image of the sun in a transparent pool of water. They are the result of the self-limitation of Brahma, through it does not in any way affect the static and unchanging character of the Absolute, just as the appearance of the snake in the rope does not, in any way, change the nature of the rope. How the

appearance takes place and why, is a mystery, for which Śaṅkara gives no satisfactory explanation. But there are *Vedāntic* interpretations by other commentators like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka and Madhva, according to whom, Bādarāyaṇa in the *Vedānta-Sūtras,* upholds the eternal nature of souls as distinct from Brahma. It is the view of modern scholars of *Vedānta,* that Rāmānuja is more faithful than Śaṅkara, to the sense of *Vedānta-Sūtras,* in insisting on the separate character of the souls. There are many Sūtras in which the distinction between God and souls is clearly formulated and in interpreting which, according to his own way of thinking, Śaṅkara had to do a lot of hair-splitting. As already stated, the majority of the Hindus are the followers of the religions of devotion, like Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, and devotion is only possible to a personal God. The devotees of personal God contemplate the beauty and greatness of their God as distinct from themselves, to whom they stand in the relation of a servant to his master or a son to his father, and they believe this relation to continue through all eternity, even after the soul has attainted Mokṣa or spiritual perfection. As Parama-haṁsa Rāmakṛṣṇa so characteristically puts it, a devotee wants to eat sugar and not to become sugar, *i.e.* he wants to enjoy perpetually the persence of his Lord and not to be absorbed into Him.

Evolution of Prakṛti or Matter

Of all the philosophical systems of Hinduism, the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system aims at giving an analytical exposition of the world-experience. It is empirical

in its nature, and has the nearest approach to the scientific point of view, as understood by the Western thinkers. According to this system there are nine eternal substances or Dravyas. They are *Pṛthivī* (earth), *Ap* (water), *Tejas* (light), *Vāyu* (air), *Ākāśa* (ether), *Kāla* (time), *Diś* (space), *Ātmā* (soul) and *Manas* (mind). These substances are, of course, characterized by various kinds of qualities, relations and activities. Of these Dravyas, the first four and Manas are atomic in nature.

These are the elements, out of which the manifold objects of the world, both living and non-living come into being. The formation of the world takes place through the aggregation of the atoms of earth, water, fire and air. Each Aṇu or atom is indivisible, invisible, and without a dimension.. The atoms are integrated, dis-integrated and re-integrated under the influence of an imperceptible force known as Adṛṣṭa. Two atoms of Pṛthivī or of Ap, or Tejas or Vāyu as the case may be, when joined together form a double atom, the combination of three such double atoms form what is known as a triple atom. It is only the triple atom which acquires a size ; the single or the binary atoms being without any size or dimension. Further combinations lead to still grosser and more complex forms. The main difficulty in the atomic theory is, that if the individual atom is without any extension, how can a sum of such atoms form an extended whole. If an atom is without extension, as is supposed in this system, any number of them cannot produce an extended body.

Further combinations of different kinds of compound atoms and later of their conjunction with souls and minds produce all the multiplicity of objects; animate and inanimate, which we come across in the world.

As compared to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system, the *Sāṅkhya* system goes deeper, and tries to reduce all existence to two fundamental categories; Puruṣa and Prakṛti. Puruṣa or soul is characterized as consciousness only. Whatever forms the object of consciousness, whether mental or physical, belongs to Prakṛti or matter. It is not only the material objects like water. air, stone, etc., which are the outcome of Prakṛti, but ideas, feelings, volitions etc. are also Prakṛtic in nature.

Prakṛti is the original stuff, which gives rise to all things, both physical and mental. It consists of three ingredients, known as Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. They are called Guṇas in *Sāṅkhya* terminology, but the word Guṇa does not here mean a quality. These Guṇas are, therefore, not to be regarded as qualities of matter. They are themselves the actual substances, making up Prakṛti, and each of them is infinite in number. They are like the genus in the chromosone, responsible for all later manifestations, of Prakṛti.

The Sattva substances possess the quality of transparency or illumination, Rajas of motion or force, Tamas of weight or inertia. All subjects of the world possess them. of course, in different proportions.

In mental objects, Sattva predominates, while in gross physical objects, Tamas is the predominating factor; Rajas being the energizing or moving element in all mental and physical happenings.

In the passive phase of dissolution, Prakṛti is at rest, with all the Guṇas in a condition of equilibrium. When the active phase of world-formation begins again, the equilibrium is disturbed, and the process of evolution starts, and there are produced in logical order, various principles or Tattvas, which later become the elements giving rise to the infinite multiplicity of animate and inanimate objects.

From the original Prakṛti or Pradhāna or Avyakta, as it is also called, is evolved Mahat or Buddhi. It is a stage in the evolution of Prakṛti, in which the Sàttva elements predominate over the Rajas and Tamas elements, but they yet form a composite whole. The next stage is that of Ahaṅkāra. At this stage the composite whole gets into a state of readiness for differentiation into a number of principles or Tattvas. Ahaṅkāra is the principle of egoity or separate individuality. From the stage of Ahaṅkāra, there is a further differentiation in two directions the first in the direction of the production of mind, the five organs of sense and five organs of action, the second in the direction of differentiation takes the form of five Tanmātrās or subtle elements which are the earlier stages out of which the five gross elements in the order of *Ākāśa* (ether), *Vāyu* (air), (c) *Tejas* (fire or light), (d) *Ap* (water),

(e) *Pṛthivī* (earth) are produced. The five elements in the order given are the seats of the qualities of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell respectively, to be cognized by the five sense organs. Each of these elements after Ākāśa posesses the quality or qualities of the preceding elements besides its own.

These twenty-four principles with Puruṣa as the twentyfifth, form the elements or constituents of the phenomenal world. Prakṛti in its various forms, is thus the mother of whatever we find in the universe. *Sāṅkhya* is concerned only with the description of the evolution of these principles. What happens later, is the combination of some or all of these elements in varying proportions to produce the objects of the world, and their further causal transformations. Man is the highest product of evolution, and he has in him, besides the five gross elements, all the other elements also, such as Buddhi, Ahaṅkāra, mind, sense organs etc. The objects, which he experiences in dreams or which he imagines in his mind, are made up of the subtle elements, known as the five Tanmātrās.

According to *Sāṅkhya,* the evolution of Prakṛti or creation of the world takes place only for the enjoyment of each individual Puruṣa or soul, who is the spectator or looker of these various spectacles of Prakṛti. The Puruṣa in his ignorance imagines himself to be the doer, and thus involves himself into the worldly temptations.

The account of the creation of world as given

by *Sāṅkhya* is accepted by *Vedānta*, with the difference, that it posits an intelligent principle or Brahma as essential to the creation of the world. Unintelligent Prakṛti cannot according to *Vedānta*, be sufficient to bring about its own orderly evolution. Prakṛti is regarded by *Vedānta* as the energy or Śakti of Brahma. Just as light cannot be separated from the sun or agni, similarly Brahma and Śakti are indissolubly bound together. Similarly souls are compared to the sparks, emitted by fire. Thus the conception of the Brahma or the Absolute, which *Vedānta* presents before us, is that of an organic whole, which somehow embraces in its totality not only its ever-present Śakti or energy but also the various units of consciousness or souls. We can distinguish them in thought, but in actuality the souls and matter indissolubly fall into the all-comprehending Absolute.

The Doctrine of Karma

Man is the highest product of creation. Analytically he is compounded of soul, mind and body. His contacts with objects of the world produce feelings of pleasure or pain, desires and aversions, and various kinds of knowledge. He is subject to a flux of experiences, which either bring happiness or pain. He wants to repeat the pleasant experiences and avoid the unpleasant ones. Neither the one nor the other kind of activity gives him an abiding satisfaction, both being ephemeral in character. But he continues

throughout life, the search for happiness, till death puts an end to the drama of his existence.

But is it really the end of the drama of the human life ? According to Hinduism it is not. After death, there is the rebirth of soul in a new body, and this continues, till deliverance is obtained from the life of bondage and imperfection.

The chief factor, which is basic to the belief in the law of Karma, with the allied doctrine of metempsychosis, is the inseparable cannection found to exist between the action and its consequences. Besides its external consequences, the action also produces an effect upon the character and disposition of the agent. After the act, the agent is not what he was before. The effects of the action do not die out with the death of the agent, but are carried over to his next birth. This is shown by the presence of inequalities among mankind, in respect of intelligence, fortune, social position and natural talents. When people learn to believe in the universal sway of the law of causation, they cannot help trying to ascertain the cause of these inequalities. The modern man may seek to explain them with the help of the laws of heredity or social causes. Of course, certain physical traits like the colour of skin, height, features etc. may admit of such an explanation, but the followers of the doctrine of metempsyschosis believe, that there are many mental and spiritual phenomena, such as the birth of gifted and talented children,

men of genius, and spiritual giants, as well as the birth of feeble-minded people in otherwise normal families, the presence of certain aspirations, emotional experiences, yearnings and propensities, which can be more satisfactorily explained on the basis of the continuity of the individual soul through different lives. When the soul leaves one body, it chooses its next parentage and environment, in consonance with its aptitudes and characteristics, acquired in previous lives.

It is sometimes objected to this view, that it involves an infinite regression in explaining the phenomena of inequalities in the world. It does not explain how the inequalities appeared right in the beginning. In the first place, according to the Hindu theory of the unending cycles of creation and dissolution, there is no absolute beginning anywhere, but even supposing that there was a beginning, it is not given to man to know every thing in all its stages. No science claims to know the beginnings of the phenomena it deals with. It takes them as it finds them, and tries to explain them in their causal connections ; at the same time professing ignorance of the origin or beginning of those phenomena. If a scientific theory can give a satisfactory explanation of the facts as they are found, it is accepted as true. The doctrine of Karma similarly, in the view of its supporters, explains the existing inequalities amongst mankind in a much more satisfactory manner than any other theory.

Some Western writers like Prof. Kieth have suggested, that the doctrine of Karma is essentially fatalistic, and does not provide any incentive for moral progress. This is a mistaken view.

There is perfect scope in this theory for the exercise of free will. The present condition of an individual is due to his past deeds and experiences, but it does not preclude him from regulating his conduct, and exercising restraint upon his impulses, in order to live in a rational manner. The Hindu Śāstras have always laid due emphasis on the factor of effort for success in life. "The sage Yājñavalkya laid down that the fruition of an act depended upon human effort, and the favourable factors created by a man's own previous actions."[1]

"The word *Niyati* or fate or destiny is, no doubt, used in many passages in our sacred books, but it simply means the aggregate of external factors or conditions, which work either in a man's favour or against him. Human effort is not always attended with success, it requires the co-operation of several factors. "The factors, which are not dependent upon a man's own volition, and which are arrayed against him; the circumstances, which are beyond his control, and could not have been foreseen and which go by the name of chance are called destiny or fate."[2] But it would be wrong to infer from it, that a man's own effort and volition play no part whatsoever.

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1. Sir S'iva Swamy Aiyar, *Evolution of Hindu Moral Ideals*, p. 190.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

We find a large number of writers, both in the East and the West holding this view at one time or another. To speak of the modern writers, Hume, Schoupenheur, Mc-Taggart and some others have expresssd their concurrence with the theory of re-incranation. Recently Mcneile Dixon, in his famous Gifford lectures published under the title of '*Human Situation,*' has strongly supported this theory. He says "Of all doctrines of a future life, palingenisis or rebirth, which carries with it, the idea of pre-existence, is by far the most ancient and most widely held; the only system to which as said Hume, 'philosophy can hearken'. 'The soul is eternal and migratory' say the Egyptians......In its existence birth and death are events......This belief taught by Pythagoras, to which Plato and Plotinus were attached, has been held by Christian Fathers, as well as by many philosophers since the dawn of civilization. It has made the tour of the world, and seems, indeed, to be in accordance with nature's own favourite way of thought, of which she so insistently reminds us; in herrhythms and recurrences, her cycles and revolving seasons." (p. 433.)

The doctrine of Transmigration has had a gradual development since the Vedic times. In the *Vedas* themselves there is no clear allusion to this theory. It makes its appearance in the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads*, and is greatly developed in the *Darśanas*, *Smṛtis* and the *Purāṇas*. In the *Purāṇas* and *Smṛtis*, many fantastic and even absurd speculations have

been woven around the doctrine which, though not having any rational connection with the doctrine of rebirth, have nevertheless taken a strong hold of popular imagination. We are told, for instance, in *Manu* XII, 54-55 etc. that a Brāhmaṇa-killer is born in successive birhs as a dog, boar, ass, camel, bull, goat, sheep, bird etc. The violator of the bed of Guru migrates a hundred times into the forms of grasses, shrubs, plants etc. In *Manu* XI, 48–52 it is said that anyone who has stolen gold in a former life will suffer from whitlows on the nails, a drinker of spirits will have black teeth, and the killer of Brāhmaṇa will suffer from consumption.[1] Possibly these speculations influenced Plato also. He writes in the *Timaeus* (72, 73), that those who have led innocent but frivolous lives will be changed into birds. Those who have not cared to learn the truths of philosophy will become beasts and those whose lives have been marked by extremes of ignorance and folly will become fishes, oysters etc.[2]

These are mere speculations, and have no necessary relation to the doctrine of metempsychosis. But when once a doctrine gets established, various sorts of fanciful ideas grow up around it. Its real significance is that it lays emphasis on the spiritual evolution of soul from one stage to another. As the soul evolves to a higher stage, it gets a body commensurate with its needs, and so it goes on from birth

1. *Indian Wisdom*, p. 66-67.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

to birth, till it attains the highest goal of perfection. It is obvious that one life-time is not at all adequate for reaching the state of perfection. This is the central core of the doctrine of Karma. All else is mere speculation.

Bondage and Emancipation

The union of the soul with the body, according to Hinduism, is the cause of its bondage. The soul forgets its real nature, and gets itself involved into worldly pursuits and temptations. All suffering is the result of its identification with the bodily sensations and activities. When connected with the body, the soul begins to apprehend the objects of the world through sense organs. The apprehension of objects is accompanied by pleasant and painful feelings. The illusory pleasures of the world become so attractive, that the embodied soul spends the whole life in the pursuit of these vain and transient satisfactions. One desire leads to another and so the series goes on till death puts an end to this wild-goose chase after sensous happiness. Really there is no end to it, and the pursuit continues in the next life and other succeeding lives; till ultimately as the result of surfeit, there dawns a realization of the futile nature of worldly pursuits and the individual turns from them to the contemplation of the true nature of his self and the supreme reality. It is then that one becomes free from the bondage of Karma and ultimately attains Mokṣa ; a state of blissfulness or complete emancipation from all sufferings and sorrows. The process of

realization can, however, be greatly shortened by the pursuit of spiritual Sādhanas.

In Hindu thought a great importance is attached to Karma. The term, however, is to be understood in a broad sense. All activities, whether mental or physical, are included in the category of Karma. A person, who outwardly does nothing, but is inwardly engaged in all kinds of thoughts is doing Karma nevertheless, and Karma in this broad sense becomes a source of attachment to the things of the world and thereby of bondage. As long as this bondage or attachment to the things of the world continues, one has to come again and again into the world through successive births. Emancipation is achieved only through a complete knowledge of reality, and continuous living on that higher plane.

According to the extreme followers of Advaita, the soul after liberation is completely absorbed into the Brahma, while in the view of the followers of Rāmānuja and the Dvaita systems, the emancipated soul does not lose its identity, but remains in perpetual nearness to God, enjoying a state of unalloyed blissfulness. The Advaita Vedāntists also accept the condition of Jīvana-mukti, *i.e.* liberation during the life-time of an individual. He continues to live in an embodied state, till the fruits of his Prārabdha Karma are completely exhausted. The other Vedāntists are of the view, that Mokṣa is only possible after death.

The Methods of Spiritual Realization

Religion is not simply a matter of belief. It aims at a direct experience of reality. We have in Hinduism, the inculcation of the method for reaching the goal of direct experience or spiritual realization. But the method is not the same for all individuals. Three different ways are, therefore, proposed for people of active, emotional and reflective temperaments respectively. They are, however, not to be regarded as entirely exclusive of one another. There is only a difference in the distribution of emphasis upon one aspect of the mind or the other. A person of active temperament will be more inclined towards a life of action than an emotional or a reflective person, whose interests lie in the domain of emotional and intellectual persuits. Actually knowledge, feeling and action mingle together in an indissoluble whole. The three modes of realization are known as *Karma-Yoga* (Path of Action), *Bhakti-Yoga* (Path of Devotion or Love) and *Jñāna-Yoga* (Path of Knowledge).

Karma-Yoga

We all have to do some work or another. Work is inevitable; but few know the secret of doing work in the right manner. Karma-Yoga aims at imparting this secret to us. "Work incessantly, but give up all attachment to work. Hold your mind free." We are to put the utmost exertion and thought in doing our work, but we are not to worry absolutely

about the resulting consequences. That is the only way to be free from the bondage of actions, even while we are actually doing them. The *Gitā* has given a most convincing exposition of the doctrine of disinterested performance of action. Each one is to do his or her allotted work in a detached manner, without any desire for reward, or any anxiety or worry about the results. "But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the results. In regard to every action we must know the result, that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and our capacity for it. One should be wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before oneself, but one should not have any anxiety or worry about the results and their relation to oneself". (Mahātmā Gāndhī).

If one can get into the habit of always acting in this way, it should bring a tremendous change in one's spiritual life. The person, who does a certain work, because it has devolved upon him as a Dharma or duty, and is not in the slightest degree actuated by a desire to seek fame, or personal gain or power over others and who during the performance of the act or after, does not feel any anxiety about the success or failure in regard to the objective of the action, who works in a spirit of complete dedication and to whom work is a means for the worship of God ; such a person inevitably, by following the path of Karma-Yoga, reaches the stage of spiritual perfection. The man of the world is lost in the various activities

of the world, but a Karma-Yogī works incessantly in the world without getting involved in it, like God Himself. We are to select our work in life according to the truth of our inmost nature. "Our Svadharma or outward life and our Svabhāva or inner being must answer to each other. Only then will action be free, easy and spontaneous." But according to Karma-Yoga we are to work as master and not as a slave. "Look at these poor slaves to duty" Says Vivekānanda, "Duty leaves them no time to say prayers, no time to bathe. Duty is ever with them." He says again, "Whatever you have to give to the world, do give by all means, but not as a duty. Be not compelled. Everything that you do under compulsion goes to build up attachment..........Resign everything unto God. We are all simply working out His will, and have nothing to do with reward or punishment."

Bhakti-Yoga

It is a way of devotion and love. Nārada described Bhakti as an intense love for God. According to Śāṇdilya, it is a supreme longing for God for its own sake. This method suits people of emotional temperament, those who are easily swayed by great emotion. The path of devotion requires the devotee to consecrate the energy of all his emotions to the love of the Lord. The devotee contemplates God's power, wisdom and goodness, fills his heart with divine love and faith by the constant remembrance of his name, by the constant singing of his praises and by seeking

the company of holy men. He directs, so to speak his whole being towards God.

The Bhakta also performs his daily duties in a spirit of service ; but his interest lies more in acts of worship and adoration. To him his daily duties may be a sort of encumbrance to which he would like, if possible, to devote the minimum attention so that he may give the major part of his time and attention to acts of devotion and to the company of religious and holy persons.

Bhakti requires us to surrender ourselves completely to God. "We must empty ourselves of all desires and wait in trust on the supreme Being." The basis of Bhakti is faith. Complete faith is fulfilment of the human spirit and leads to self-forget fulness in complete union with God. The path of Bhakti also leads to Jñāna, the realization of God's presence in all living beings and things.

Where there is love, there is the presence of the Supreme, but man is not to stop at intermediate stages, but to march ahead till he realizes the presence of God in everything. The periphery of love should go on expanding till it embraces the whole world.

Jñāna-Yoga

This path of realization is prescribed for men of reflection. It requires, in the first place, a metaphysical knowledge of realities. This is to be obtained by Śravaṇa and Manana, that is by study and reflection, The aspiring pupil, after cultivating in himself, the

virtues of discrimination, harmlessness, non-attachments, self-restraint and calmness, tries to acquire from a competant teacher instruction about the nature of God, soul etc. or in the absence of a teacher, he gets this knowledge from the study of religious books. For the seekers of knowledge, *Upaniṣads* and *Gītā* are said to be the best works for religious instruction. The study of these works is to be followed by a logical reflection on their contents. It will strengthen his conviction in the truth of the doctrines taught in these works.

Śravaṇa and Manana are to be followed by Nididhyāsana or meditation. Meditation consists in the concentration of mind on the supreme reality by the constant repetition of Om or any other similar brief formula. In meditation, the Jñāna-mārge makes use of the method of concentration expounded in Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras.* As a matter of fact, Pantañjali's method of concentration is more or less practised by all aspirants; but in the case of a follower of the method of knowledge, concentration in the form of meditative exercises becomes a necessity. Meditation transforms the metaphysical knowledge of the supreme reality into direct realization.

There are two levels of Jñāna-Yoga. At the first level, we are to learn to distinguish the self from the not-self. By applying the process of analysis, we discover that the self is not the body, nor is it the intellect, emotions, feelings or the desires. It is distinct from all the contents of consciousness. They

are transient and perishable, and hence different from the self which is eternal and everlasing. At the second level we are to realize that behind the finite self there is the infinite reality; the soul of the souls, which expresses itself in finite souls and in external manifestations. When this realization becomes perfect, the aspirant rises above the limitations of individual consciousness, and has an uninterrupted experience of a blissful state of existence.

Patañjali's Yoga or Rāja-Yoga

It is mainly a discipline for acquiring a complete mastery over the mind and its modifications. Normally, we are at the mercy of all sorts of invading ideas and impressions. If we could learn the art of stilling the mind, and concentrating our mental energies on right objects, great powers would be at our disposal. Rāja-Yoga teaches certain exercises for concentrating the mind. One should not, however, in any case undertake the course of Rāja-Yoga without the guidance of a competent Guru, otherwise a great injury may happen to his psycho-physiological system.

The followers of Rāja-Yoga claim. that it is in itself a complete method of divine realization. When a person succeeds, after a long continued practice, in completely suppressing the activities of the mind, a state of Samādhi or trance-like condition emerges, in which the higher cosmic consciousness make its appearance.

The various methods, described above, are not

really exclusive of one another. There is in them mainly a difference in the laying of emphasis on one aspect of the mind or the other. In *Gītā*, there is an attempt at the synthesis of all these methods. It makes use of the concentration exercises of Rāja-Yoga for stilling the mind, the element of complete surrender to God, from Bhakti-Yoga, the doctrine of the discrimination of self from the not-self and the vision of God everywhere in all things and in all happenings, from Jñāna-Yoga, and the surrender of fruits of action and even action itself to God in complete freedom from the pairs of opposites like success or failure, gain or loss, honour or dishonour, from Karma-Yoga. It thus presents to us a complete method of divine realization.

Individual and Social Ethics

From very ancient times, the Hindus have adopted an integrated view of life. To the Vedic Aryans, *Dharma* (virtue), *Artha* (wealth) and *Kāma* (pleasure) constituted the three-fold goal of life. They gave the first position to Dharma, because in their view, the pursuit of wealth and enjoyment without the background of righteousness led to sin and immorality. From the period of *Upaniṣads* onwards, the goal of Mokṣa was added to the three-fold goal of the early Vedic Aryans.

Truthfulness, purity, fearlessness, generosity, compassion, self-restraint, kindness, and wisdom are some of the essential virtues of Hinduism, as they

are also of other civilized nations. Ever since the birth of Buddhism and Jainism in India, Ahiṁsā has been given a prominent place in Hindu ethics, and its scope was extended even to the protection of lower animals. The duty of kindness to animals has been nowhere so much insisted upon as in Hinduism. Toleration is another virtue, which may be regarded as the special feature of Hinduism. At a very early period, Hinduism came to realize clearly, that it is not given to any man or nation to know the whole truth completely. Truth is infinite, and we should, therefore, be always ready to accept new revelations of truth and to tolerate the viewpoints of others, even if we cannot agree with them. According to Hinduism, "The claim that any one religion is the sole vehicle or embodiment of truth and that all other religions are false is the height of presumption."[1] The idea of duty is another feature, which has exercised a great fascination over the Hindu mind. In Hinduism, duties in the form of Svadharma take precedence over rights. If each individual in society were to perform his allotted task in a spirit of dedication, all would be well. It is left to society to look after the wants and needs of its individual members, or what in modern times, are known as human rights. It may be granted, that the doctrine of Svadharma was, on occasions exploited by higher classes in order to keep the lower classes to perpetual subjection.

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1. Sir Siva Swami Ayar : *Evolution of Hindu Moral Ideals* p. 186.

When Mokṣa was added to Dharma, Artha and Kāma, to give a complete idea of the goal of life, certain new virtues came to be associated with it. The most important of these virtues was Vairāgya or renunciation. In course of time, Mokṣa became the predominent goal, and renunciation the most admirable virtue. Buddha was probably the first great teacher in the history of Indian culture to publicly preach the doctrine of renunciation amongst all strata of society. So great was the influence of his teaching, that the cult of renunciation became extremely popular, and thoughtful people in large numbers retired from active life and became Bhikṣus or monks. It seems that the cult of renunciation began to spread at an alarmingly high rate both among the Buddhists and the Hindus, so there was a reaction against the view, that renunciation was an indispensable means for obtaining Mokṣa. We find in *Bhagavad-Gītā*, a new solution offered for this problem ; namely that one could aspire to salvation, while living in the world and pursuing one's allotted duties of life, provided he brought to bear upon them the spirit of detachment. A person, who fulfilled his obligations from a pure sense of duty, without any expectation of reward, and in a spirit of dedication to the supreme Lord, could attain the highest end of life without any resort to Sannyāsa. Manu similarly enjoined, that no one should adopt the life of a Sannyāsī without having previously fulfilled the duties of a householder. Kauṭilya in his *Artha-Śāstra*

prescribed punishment for persons, who renounced the world and became Sannyāsī, while still young. When Buddhism spread to China. monasteries were founded all over the country, which housed several lacs of Bhikṣus. The Chinese Government of that period had to force thousands of young monks to marry and readopt the life of householders.

In spite of all these efforts to check the spread of Sannyāsa, and to emphasise the importance of the selfless performance of one's duties, we find that renunciation remained the key-note of Indian culture throughout the medeival period, right up to the establishment of British rule in India. Buddhism disappeared from India, but its spirit of renunciation had been imbibed by Hinduism, and it has remained a determining force through succeeding centuries up to modern times.

The Four Āśramas

The Hindu thinkers divided the life of man into four stages. In post-Vedic literature, we find an elaborate description of these four stages of life. The first stage of life is that of a student or Brahmacārī. A great value was attached to knowledge in ancient time and a Brahmacārī was an object of respect and love. He was expected to live in the house of his teacher (Guru-kula or Ācārya-kula as it was called) for a number of years, and imbibe from him the arts and sciences, which were taught in those times. The Āśramas of teachers had all the necessary equip-

ment, and were well-looked after by the princes and the wealthy people.

A Brahmacārī was expected to lead a life of celibacy. Being unmarried, he was free from the trammels of wife and children, and, therefore, he could devote himself whole-heartedly to his studies and the learning of special skills. He led a life of simplicity and austerity, and the same style of living was prescribed for a prince as for a poor young man. They had to work hard and render all sorts of services. Cleaning of the house, looking after the flowers and the gardens, cutting wood and tending cows and horses were some of the services, which all Brahmacārīs had to perform during their stay in the Ācārya-kula.

In this way, leading a strictly regulated life, and with complete devotion to the teacher, the Brahmacārīs acquired learning and skills, and developed high character, a great sense of honour and integrity of life.

After completing the stage of Brahmacarya, the youngman entered the life of a householder. This was the second stage of life known as Gṛhastha-Āśrama. In Hindu Śāstras this Āśrama has been given a place of prominence, as on it all the other Āśramas depend. He was to bring up a family and thus keep the race going. The procreation of children was regarded as a sacred duty, a paying back of the debt, which he owed to his Pitṛs or ancestors. Ancient India as a rule did not countenance the idea of a person becoming a recluse or a Sannyāsī, without having done

his required share of work as a householder. Withdrawal of the most healthy and biologically the fittest elements of society from married life, which became a fashion in later times, was not considered wholesome. Monastic tendencies were discouraged until one had lived a life of controlled and legitimate gratification of natural impulses.

Beside the fulfilment of their special duties and responsibilities, the married couple were enjoined to perform regulary the five sacrifices, which included hospitality to guests, service of parents and elderly persons and kindness to animals. These Yajñas were a means for extending love and service beyond the family, and to prepare the individual for the universal love of humanity.

The Gṛhastha-Āśrama was followed by the Vānaprastha-Āśrama, which meant retirement from active work, and dedication oneself to a life of study and meditation. It was realized that a time should come, when a person had to hand over his responsibilities to the younger members, and devote himself to spiritual aims. He was to stop interfering in the domestic affairs, leaving them entirely to his sons. The ancient point of veiw was, that a person should not remain attached to the worldly affairs till the end of his life. It is also in the interest of society, that young blood should keep flowing in its arteries and save it stagnation and conservatism.

According to the Hindu view of life, man is much more than a member of society. Even if he were to

be completely adjusted to his social environment, as a bee is to the beehive, he would not attain complete satisfaction. He has personal life also, which clamours for satisfaction. "Family and country, nation and the world, cannot satisfy the soul of man and what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul." The Vānaprastha stage of life was meant to be used for resolving all doubts and making an all out effort for spiritual attainment.

The stage of Vānaprastha was expected to lead automatically to the stage of Sannyāsa. It was only a higher level of the Vānaprastha stage, At this last stage, all doubts are removed and one attains a state of complete spiritual freedom. He is no longer tempted by riches or honour. He is neither elated by successes nor depressed by failures. His love extends to the whole of humanity and he hates none. He remains patient and calm under all circumstances and death has no fear for him. Sannyāsa is thus more a state of mind than an external change of appearance, which is generally, though erroneously, regarded as a neccessary part of it.

The institution of the four Āśramas clearly brings home to us the ideal of spiritual perfection, which Hinduism places before an individual. Not riches, nor power, nor political influence, nor prestige is proposed as the ultimate end of life. The end is the realization of spiritual freedom and complete adjustment with all things.

Though the word Āśrama does not occur in the

Veda, there are references in it to the life of Brahmacārī (RV. VII, 103, 5; I, 112, 2; AV. XI, 5, 1), to the Gṛhapati, the prototype of the later Gṛhasthī (RV. VI, 53, 2) and to a long-haired Muni (RV. X, 136). They are the beginnings of the Āśrama system of later times.

It is great thing to aspire to the ideal of Mokṣa, and to reach a state of perfection and complete detachment in one's life-time. It is the proper culmination of an active life, spent in the pursuit of one's duties and obligations. But when we find in medieval age, people both educated and uneducated, in large numbers becoming Sādhus and Sannyāsīs in the full bloom of their youth; when we find a general atmosphere of world-weariness pervading the society as a whole, it certainly calls for an explanation. India has seen many invasions from marauding tribes from outside from a very early period. Some of the invasions took place even before the Christian era, after the fall of the Mauryan Empire. But it seems that the period of Muslim rule after 1000 A.D. was the most dismal period of her history. During this period there was hardly any scope for a free expression of the energies of the Indian people. There is no wonder, if we find a note of melancholy and world-weariness throughout the literature of this period. As the world held no reward or attraction for the majority of people, their attention was turned to the next world, and the joys and pleasures of this world came to be denounced as illusory and worthless.

The Varṇa-System

In early Vedic times, the Aryan society was divided into three classes. "The Brāhmaṇas," says a Vedic verse, "Animate their thoughts, O Aśvins, strengthen the Kṣatras, strengthen the Viśas......" (RV. VIII, 35, 16 ; 18). Apart from the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas, the rest of the people formed the great class of Viśas or the masses. We find mention of the same division of society by Plato, though the divisions are named in different ways. The Śūdras were not an integral part of the Aryan society, and as already indicated were incorporated at a later age, after the conquest of non-Aryan tribes.

Various sorts of evils crept into Hindu social system later on ; but the underlying idea of the Varṇa system is made clear from the comparison, in a well-known verse in the *Ṛgveda*, of the various social classes with the parts of the primeval Puruṣa, with his head, arms, thighs and feet. In modern language, it is known as the organic theory of society. The various classes are the interrelated parts of social organism. The welfare and health of the total organism depend upon the proper functioning of each part. Everybody according to the Hindu theory is born to fill a certain place in society. His well-being consists in performing his Svadharma or the duties of his particular station in a spirit of service and dedication. It is taught in the *Gītā*, that one should do one's own duty, however arduous or un-

pleasant it may appear, and should, on no account, give it up in order to take up the duty, which belongs to another. This idea was made explicit in the literature of later times, wherein it was clearly stated that each person, to whatever class he might belong, could aspire to Mokṣa by the honest performance of his particular calling.

This idea actually worked in Hindu society during all the previous centuries. The members of each group performed the work, to which they were called by their birth, and it did not occur to them that there was anything wrong in the organisation of society on the basis of heredity. To them it appeared the most natural thing, that everybody should do well the work which belonged to him by reason of his birth in a particular caste, leaving it to society to look after his physical and other wants. It led to smooth working in society, but this type of social organization, besides being unjust to the lower orders of society, lacked unity and it was, therefore, no match against concerted attacks of external foes. Even in the face of the danger of extermination, the people could not give a united front to the enemy, because it was supposed to be the duty of the Kṣatriyas alone to fight, whenever the enemy attacked the country.

It may be accepted without any doubt, that what goes by the name of modern Hinduism is the outcome of the joint contributions of the Aryans

and the non-Aryans. But it is very difficult to disentangle the Aryan and the non-Aryan strands, which have gone to the making of this complicated texture of Hinduism. It can be said with more or less certitude, that most of the elements of popular religion and popular customs as already shown in a previous chapter, have been borrowed from non-Aryan sources, while the higher religion and Philosophy of Hinduism have mostly been inspired by the *Upaniṣadic* teachings of the Aryan thinkers and sages.

The orthodox systems of Indian philosophy are mostly derived from the *Upaniṣads*. While *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Yoga* and *Mīmāṁsā* have their roots in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedas*, the *Vedānta* system of philosophy, which is most popular among the Hindus, is entirely and avowedly based upon the *Upaniṣads*.

As regards the methods of spiritual attainment, the Jñāna-mārga is definitely the method of the *Upaniṣads* in its triple aspects of Śravaṇa, Manana and Nididhyāsana. The Yogic method of concentration, which is the subject of Patañjali's *Yoga-Darśana* is clearly referred to, in *Śvetāśvatara* and in some other *Upaniṣads* also. The methods of action and devotion in their explicit forms appear to be the contribution of *Bhagavad-Gītā* in the post-*Upaniṣadic* period and were probably inspired by non-Aryan influences.

The *Upaniṣads*, as we already know, are an elaboration of the philosophical portions of the *Vedas*. Thus, there is a continuity of thought from the *Vedas*, through the *Upaniṣads*, to the philosophical systems and higher religion of later day Hinduism. All this higher thought appears in all likelihood to be the achievement of the Aryan mind.



CHAPTER VII

Great Achievements

Cultural Expansion

During these centuries, India has many achievements to its credit. It made notable contributions to science, philosophy and art. It thought out great religious systems and gave expression to some of the most profound conceptions on the art of living, and spiritual attainment. Its equally great achievement was to spread the light of its culture and civilization among the people of near and distant countries. At a very early period, we find religious missions departing to foreign countries and taking with them not only Buddhistic and Brāhmaṇical religious systems, but also language, science, philosophy, script and other essentials of civilized life.

We find them going to Laṅkā or Ceylon in the south ; to Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan in the north, and to Burma, Siam then known as Campā, Komboj (Combodia), Malayā, Jāvā Sumātrā, Bāli, and Borneo in the east and south-east. Besides the

missinoaries, the trading communities and the enterprizing colonists, also played a very important part in spreading Indian culture, especially in Central Asia and south-eastern regions.

Ceylon

The first country to come under the influence of Indian culture was Laṅkā (Ceylon) in the extreme south of India. In the third century B.C. the Emperor Aśoka deputed his own son Mahendra to preach the noble doctrine of Buddhism to the people of Laṅkā. The King and Queen of Laṅkā became devout Buddhists, and, at their request, Aśoka sent his daughter Saṅghamittā to work among the women of that country. Buddhism spread rapidly among the people and since that time it has continued to be the prevalent religion of Ceylon. It also became the means of unifying the various races of that country into an integrated whole.

Central Asia

Even in the third centruy B. C. a number of colonists from India had settled in some parts of Central Asia. By the fifth century A.D. according to the testimony of Fa-hein, the great Chinese traveller, practically the whole of Central Asia had come under the influence of Indian religion and culture. The Indians had their settlements, chiefly in Yarkand, Kashgar and Khotan in the south of Chinese Turkistan, and in Kuchor, Karashar and Turfan in the north. These were fertile lands, the rest of the country being

only a sandy desert. The Brāhmī script and Sanskrit came to be used in the north, and Kharoṣṭī script and Prākṛta became prevalent in the south.

By the third century A.D. Khotan had become the centre of Buddhist teaching. There was such a large influx of immigrants from the North-West of India to these settlements, that the language of India became the official language of these regions. The Indian names became common and Indian ceremonies were performed on all important occasions.

When in the seventh century the famous Chinese traveller Hauen-Tsang passed through this region, on his way back to China from India, he found Buddhism a flourshing religion in these parts. There was a large number of Buddhist monastaries spread all over the region and thousands of Buddhist Bhikṣus lived in them.

China, Japan, Tibet, Mangolia

Buddhism was introduced into China in the first century A.D. by two Buddhist monks, Mātaṅga and Kaśyapa. It is said that these scholars went to China at the request of the then-reigning Emperor Mingta. A large number of scholars followed in later years, so that in the 6th century A. D. there were more than 3000 Indian Buddhist Bhikṣus living in one province of China alone.

These scholars translated many Buddhist works into the Chinese language. and also wrote original books in Chinese. One of them Kumārajīva, who

went to China in 401 A.D. wrote a large number of books, 47 of which are still available. In course of time, the Chinese pilgrims also began to visit India, some by land route across the Gobi desert and the plains and mountains of Central Asia and over the Himālayas, a long and perilous journey. Another route was by sea via Indo-China, Jāvā Sumātrā and Malayā, which was shorter but no less risky. Fa-hein, Sung-yen, Huen-Tsang and I-Sing have left records of their travels in India. Huen-Tsang, the most famous of them, came to India in the seventh century and studied for a number of years at the Nālanda University, which was then a great centre of learning, with more than ten thousand students and monks residing on its campus. Huen-Tsang, after taking his Doctorate at Nālanda, became the Vice-principal of that University for a number of years.

For the first two hundred years after its introduction into China, Buddhism did not make much headway ; but from the third century A.D. it began to spread rapidly. In the 6th century, there were thirty thousand Buddhist monastaries in China, and twenty lacs of monks lived in them. It is said, that there was such a great fascination for the life of renunciation, that hundreds of thousands of people preferred to become monks; so that a dearth of labour came to be felt. It led to a revulsion against the cult of renunciation. In the ninth century, it is said, 4600 Buddhist monastaries were demolished and 2,60,000 Bhikṣus were forced to become householders. In the 10th century, under the influence of

Confucianism, which had not taken kindly to Buddhism from the very beginning, on account of its different outlook on life, 30,000 Buddhist temples were closed down. But these measures had no appreciable effect on the spread of Buddhism among the Chinese. It had, however, to make some adjustments with the religions of China, Taoism and Confucianism. Some of the native gods, and the popular Chinese customs and ways of life were incorporated into Buddhism, and the Bhikṣus in China were allowed to marry, even though they lived the life of monks. In this way Buddhism was assimilated into the life-fabric of the Chinese people.

This is what Huen-Tsang writes about the Indian people, as he saw them in the seventh century. "They are not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct, and are faithful in their oaths and promises. In their rule of government, there is remarkable rectitude, whilst in their behaviour, there is much gentleness and sweetness. With respect to criminals or rebels, these are few in number, and only occasionally troublesome." Political relations were established between China and India as the result of the visit of this great scholar and embassies were exchanged. These contacts continued as long as Buddhism was strong in India. After its decay the political, cultural and other relations between the two countries came to a stop. After many centuries they have been revived once again, on the attainment of freedom by India, and the two great peoples have begun to feel

warmly for each other, the old memories of friendship, reasserting themselves all the more strongly after having remained in abeyance so long.

From China. Buddhism spread to Korea, and by the 6th century, the whole of Korea had come under the influence of Buddhism From Korea it travelled to Japan where after some opposition in the beginning, it was adopted by the royal court and the people. In the eighth century, Japanese Emperor set up a huge bronze statue of Buddha about 56 feet high, at a colossal expense. Buddhism is a popular religion in Japan along with Shintoism and Confucianism.

In the seventh century, Buddhism found its entrance into Tibet in a quaint manner. The powerful king of the period, Swang-Chan-Gampo married two princesses from China and Nepal respectively. As both these princesses were of Buddhist faith, they took a great interest in the spread of this great religion in Tibet. Learned scholars were invited and the great works of Buddhism were translated into Tibetan. After some centuries, the power of the kings of Tibet began to decay and the religious monastaries took the task of government into their hands. From 1400 onwards, Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism came into power.

It should be remembered, that Tibet was an uncivilized country, when it came into contact with Indian religion. The people worshipped demons, spirits and even the dead bodies of their ancestors. Human sacrifices were also sometimes made. Bud-

dhism played a very important part in extending the boons of civilization to Tibet.

In the thirteenth century, Tibet was conquered by the Mongols. The Mongol Emperor, Kubla Khan came under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, and thus this great religion along with its civilization spread as far as Mongolia, Siberia and Manchuria.

Burma

It is said that Aśoka in the third century B. C. sent two missionaries to Burma, who laid the foundations of Buddhism in Burma. There is another account according to which, Buddha-Ghoṣa, a missionary from Ceylon, first brought Buddhism to Burma. Whatever be the nature of missionary enterprize in Burma, Buddhism rapidly spread throughout the country. There was no competing religion in Burma, which could put any obstacle in the way of the spread of Buddhism. Unlike China and Japan, Buddhism at present is the only religion of the Burmese people.

South-East Asia

Here we have a different story altogether. Cultural expansion in this region came in the wake of trade and an urge for colonization. From the first century A. D. onwards. "Wave after wave of Indian colonists spread towards East and South-East, reaching Ceylon, Burmā, Malayā, Jāvā, Sumātrā, Borneo, Siam, Combodia and Indo-Chino. Some of them managed to reach Formosa, the Phillipine islands and Celebes,

even as far as Madagascur. The current language is Indonesian with a mixture of Sanskrit words."[1]

Hindu kingdoms were established in these regions, and Hindu religion in the form of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism spread throughout this area. In Combodia and Annam, there were powerful Hindu kingdoms. From 6th century A. D. to 12th century A. D. Combodia remained a most powerful kingdom, and it had a succession of mighty kings, who brought glory and name to this great kingdom. Yaśo-Varmā, who reigned from 889 A. D. to 908 A. D. is the most famous of them all. The writers of that age speak highly of his prowess, sense of justice, generosity, learning and love of art. He established Indian types of Āśramas at various places, and the head of each Āśramas was called Kulapati. These Āśramas were the centres of Hindu learning and were instrumental in spreading scholarship and culture throughout Combodia. After twelveth century, came the period of decline, Combodia was at first conquered by Siam and then in the 19th century, it came under the influence of France.

Malayā-Archipelago

From early Christian centuries the Indian traders and colonists began to visit the Malayā peninsula, and gradually spread to Jāvā, Sumātrā, Bāli, and other Indonesian islands. Hindu kingdoms were established, which continued to rule for more than a thousand years. Twice, all these islands were brought under

1. Jawahar Lal Nehru : *The Discovery of India*, p. 166.

a common rule, first under the great King Śailendra and then under Mazhapet. In the 8th century Śailendra built up a great empire in this region. He probably came from Kaliṅga in India. He first conquered South Burma and North Malaya, and then extended his sway over the whole of Malaya peninsula and the Indonesian islands. In the fourteenth century this great empire dissolved into small kingdoms, as the result of attack from Siam and Jāvā. The Arabian writers have sung the glories of Śailendra, and have spoken of his mighty power and great wealth in most eulogistic terms. In a book *Towards Angker* by Dr. H. G. Quaritch Wales published in 1937, the greatness of this monarch is praised in the words, "This great conqueror, whose achievements can only be compared with those of the greatest soldiers, known to Western history, and whose fame in his time sounded from Russia to China, in a decade or two built up a vast maritime empire, which endured for five centuries, and made possible the marvellous flowing of Indian art and culture in Jāvā and Combodia. Yet, in our encyclopedias and histories......... one will search in vain for a reference to this far-flung empire or to its noble founder."[1]

In Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa, Kiṣkindhā-Kāṇḍa.* there is a mention of the island of Jāvā under the name of Yava-Dvīpa. It has thus a long history behind it. In the fourth century A. D. Fa-huen visited this island, and in the account which he has left behind, he says

1. *Ibid*, p. 165.

that Jāvā was a stronghold of Hinduism, and Buddhism was completely non-existent.

It seems, later on Buddhism in the form of Vajra-Yāna also found its way into Jāvā, Sumātrā and other places, but it did not acquire the prominence, which Hinduism enjoyed in these islands. Borabadur, the most wonderful Buddhist stupa in the world, is constructed on a hill in Jāvā. It is a magnificent piece of architecture. In the sixteenth century, when Hindu power declined, Jāvā and other islands of Indonesia were converted to Islam. The island of Bāli is the only exception, where Hinduism flourishes even now. Hindu gods are worshipped, and cow is looked upon as sacred.

Though Jāvā was converted to Islam three centuries ago, the Jāvānese still throng the temples with offerings of incense and flowers. Indeed, *Rāmāyaṇa* is still a living force in Jāvā. For the Jāvānese masses even to-day, Rāma and Pāṇḍavas are national heroes, born and brought up in the isles of Jāvā. Puppet shows representing scenes from *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are still the most popular of entertainments, whether in the palaces of Jāvānese princes or in the humble abodes of the poor.[1]

When the Indians established their colonies and kingdoms in these regions, they later were populated by wild and uncivilized tribes. The Indian settlers brought civilization to their door, in

1. B. R. Chatterjee : *Cultural Heritage of India*, III, p. 114.

the form of religion, language, alphabet, writing, literature, social and political institutions, arts and manners. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism were introduced, and large temples were built in all important places. Durgā, Śiva and Viṣṇu were worshipped in Indian fashion, and the Hindu Saṁskāras and religious ceremonies were made prevalent. Sanskrit and the Brāhmī alphabet were used throughout the Malaya Archipelago. More than 300 manuscripts have been discovered in Annam and Combodia, which are written in refined and chaste Sanskrit, In the temples, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* were regularly recited. There are elaborate engravings of various scenes from *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* on the walls of temples. The art of architecture was highly evolved, as is shown in the unmatched temples of Angkor and Borabadur in Combodia and Jāvā respectively. These temples are so huge and magnificent, that the like of them are not found anywhere else, not even in India.

India and the West

The influence of Indian culture on Western countries is not so apparent, as in the north, south, and east of India. Buddhism, of course, spread in Afghanistan, and many relics of Buddhistic influences are found in various places there. The Persian religion of Zend-Avesta has many points of resemblance with the religion of India. But it was submerged under the wave of Islam about the sixth century A. D. Hinduism did not seem to have

exercised any influence on Islam, but it is now recognised that Muslim Sūfism owes a good deal to the Hindu influences, as will be seen in a later chapter.

There are certain facts, which go to show, that Indian religion and philosophy did exercise some influence on Greek thought, as well as, on Christianity. In the early centuries before the Christian era, there was a regular coming and going between India and Greece through Iran, and while the trade caravans went to and from exchanging their merchandise, the scholars also went from one country to the other, along the same routes. Thus Greece and India came into contact with each other from very ancient times. "During this long period of contact," Says Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru "there must have been many exchanges in the world of thought and culture, between these two ancient civilizations. There is a tradition recorded in some Greek book, that some learned Indians met Socrates, and put questions to him. Pythagorus was particularly influenced by Indian Philosophy, and Prof. H. G. Rawlinson remarks "Almost all the theories, religious, philosophical, mathematical, taught by the Pythagoreans, were known in India in the 6th century B.C." A European classical scholar Urwik has based his interpretation of the Republic of Plato upon Indian thought. Gnosticism is supposed to be a definite attempt to fuse together Greek Platonism and Indian elements. The Philosopher Oppolonius of Tyana probably visited the University of Taxila in

North-West India about the beginning of the Christian era."[1] It is quite possible, that some Greek scholars visited the Indian Universities. There is more than a passing resemblance between Indian and Greek thought in certain aspects. The belief of Pythagorus in reincarnation, the division of society by Plato into three classes, and the distinction made between reality and appearance in Plato's Republic, remind one of similar doctrines in India. The doctrine of transmigration was first plainly taught by Pythagorus, who is said to have asserted, that he remembered his own previous existences. He was followed by Plato, who is supposed by some to have been indebted to Hindu writers for his views on this subject."[2]

Alberuni, who studied the Indian systems of philosophy during his stay in India in the eleventh century, and who had already studied the Greek philosophy before coming out to India, mentions in his book on India, many common features between the philosophers of India and Greece. He also speaks of books in Sanskrit dealing with Greek Astronomy. There is no doubt that there were close cultural contacts between Greece and India in old times, though, of course, the two cultures developed along their own lines.

As regards kinship between the teachings of Buddha and Christ, Prof. Rādhākṛṣṇan remarks

1. *The Discovery of India*, p. 124.
2. Monier William : *Indian Wisdom*, p. 68.

"Both Buddha and Jesus bade their disciples lay up for themselves a treasure, which neither moth nor rust would corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.........Just as Buddha condemns the gloomy ascetic practices, which prevailed in ancient India, Jesus goes beyond John the Baptist's emphasis on observances and ascetic rites. Even as Buddha condemns ceremonial religion, Jesus insists less on sacraments, and more on the opening of oneself in faith."

"To love one's enemies, to bless them that curse, to do good to them that hate, to turn the other cheek, to leave the cloak with him who takes the coat, to give all to him who asks, which are the teachings of Jesus, are precepts, not only taught but practised in their extreme rigour by the Buddha in his many lives according to the *Jātakas*.........Both Buddha and Christ in the spirit of the *Upaniṣads*, demand the death or the sacrifice of the immediate natural existence as the condition of the new richer life. The curious may find matter for reflection in these coincidences in the lives of the two teachers."[1]

Gradually, the scholars in Western countries have begun to realize the influence, which Indian thought had in earlier times exercised on the civilization of the West. Will Durant, a well-known American writer on Philosophy, says, "India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages; she was the mother of our Philosophy,

1. Quoted by Nanak Chand Pandit in *Indian Wisdom*, pp. 122-123.

mother, through the Arabs, of our Mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity, mother, through the village community of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all."[1]

There are many striking resemblances between Buddhism and Christianity, which have led many scholars to assume the influence of early Buddhism upon the Christian religion. In his comprehnsive work on the natural influences of Christianity and Indian religions on one another, Richard Garbe assumes that the Christian Gospels have borrowed some of their fables and legends from Buddhistic sources. Maurice Winternitz, a renowned German scholar, who adopts a very cautious attitude on this question, nevertheless, says "All that can be said with certainly is that centuries before the birth of Christ, numerous trade connections, and manifold intellectual relations were already in existence between India and the West, and that there is a possibility of Christianity having been influenced by Buddhism."[2]

Trade with Foreign Countries

From very early times, India had trade relations with many foreign countries, and controlled their markets. Many of her products were so much in demand on account of their high quality, that all ancient nations were eager to have trade relations with her. India was, by all accounts, a very great industrial

1. *Ibid*, p. 105.
2. *Indian Literature*, Vol. II, p. 407.

and manufacturing nation. "Her taxtile goods, the fine products of her looms in cotton, wool, linen and silk were famous all over the civilized world, so were her exquisite jewellery and precious stones cut in very lovely form, so were her pottery, porcelains ceremanics of every kind, quality, colour and beautiful ; so were her fine works in metal, iron, steel, silver and gold. She had great merchants, great businessmen, great bankers and financiers. Not only was she the greatest ship-building nation, but she had great commerce and trade by land and sea, which extended to all known civilized countries."[1]

The trade commodities were carried to different countries in ships built in Indian ship-yards. India had a flourishing ship-building industry. Not only did she manufacture ships of different sizes and shapes for herself, but she made them for other countries also. "We read in Chinese books, of Indian merchantships appearing in the China Sea. We know definitely, that Fa-hein (399-415 A. D.) returned to China, via Jāvā by an Indian boat and further, in the period of Tang dynasty, an eye-witness tells us that there were in 750 A. D. many Brāhmaṇa ships in the Canton river.[2] During these centuries, India traded with Phoenecia, Babylon, Assyria, Persia and Rome as well as Arabia, China and countries of South-East Asia. "The most

1. Quoted by D. N. Roy in *The Spirit of Indian Civilization*, p. 122.

2. Quoted by Nanak Chand Pandit in *The Wisdom of India*, p. 160.

valuable of the exports of India was silk, which under the Persian Empire is said to have been exchanged by its weight in gold."[1] In this connection, the following oft-quoted statement of Pliny, a Roman historian, may be given. "There was no year in which India did not drain the Roman Empire of a hundered million Sesterces......So dearly do we pay for our luxury and our women." Besides silk, ivory, sandal wood, gold, silver, precious stones, cloth of all varieties and species were exported to other countries.

The Arts

India had thus, during the first millenium of the Christian era, built up a complex civilization. She was great, not only in science, literature and philosophy, she had made an equally remarkable progress in industrial pursuits, as well as in the arts of architecture, sculpture, music and painting. The love of music comes down from the ancient Vedic times. In later times many works on the theory of music were composed and there is no doubt, that the science of music had been systematized in India from very early times.

An idea of her architectural genius can be gathered from the ruins of the many-storeyed buildings of Nālanda University near Patna, and the world-famous Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta caves, carved out of solid rock. These great caves were dug out

1. *Ibid*, p. 159.

in the seventh and eighth centuries A. D. In the Ajanta caves, there are fine frescoes painted all over the walls. It is said that these frescoes were painted by the Buddhist monks. Here are found the paintings of beautiful women—princesses, singers, dancers, seated and standing, beautifying themselves or in procession. The fact of the celebate monks, painting these female figures in different poses, in a perfectly understandable phenomenon is the light of psychology of artistic creation. The suppressed sexual desires of the celibate monks found expression in the execution of these various paintings. There is a very deep connection between art and the repressed powerful urges of man.

There is a broken statue of Śiva Naṭarāja in the Elephanta caves. It is the statue of Śiva in a dancing pose. Though the statue is in a mutilated condition, even then, Havell has all praise for it. He says "though the rock itself seems to vibrate with the rythmic movement of dance, the noble head wears the same look of serene calm and dispassion, which illuminate the face of Buddha."[1] The statues of Buddha and Boddhisattvas, and of the various Jaina prophets found scattered all over India give a full and variegated idea of Indian sculpture.

Indian art was taken outside India to Central Asia, China and Japan, and countries in South-East Asia. It gave rise to wonderful creations and

1. Quoted by Jawahar Lal Nehru in *The Discovery of India*, p. 177.

inspirations in all these places. The awe-inspiring temples of Jāvā and Combodia, in their unparalleled grandeur, are standing monuments to the synthesis of Indian genius and the racial genius of these countries. The Indian influence is most marked in the art and architecture of the old Indian colonies in Combodia and Jāvā. On the walls of the magnificent temple at Borabuder in Jāvā, the whole life-story of Buddha is carved in stone. At other places there are carved the legends of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the great incarnations of Viṣṇu. The temple at Angkor in Combodia is ranked as the chief wonder of the world, on account of the wonderful architectural genius, which has gone to its making. The art of India blossomed and prospered under the influence of the artistic genius of the countries of its adoption.



CHAPTER VIII

The Beginning of Decay

Up to the end of the Gupta period, the Indian culture remained in its full bloom, expressing itself exhuberantly in various ways; in the great work of philosophy, art, drama, literature, science and mathematics. It was during this period, that it over-flowed into and enriched the cultures of countries to the North-East and South-East of India. But after the Gupta period, as we approach the end the first millenium A.D. we find a slackening of the pace, a drying up, as it were of the sources of creative thinking. We do not come across any great work of original thought in any department of literary and cultural activity, except perhaps in the domain of art. This was due to the influence and incentive provided by the foreign styles of art, brought into India by Muslim invaders. In the South of India, the growth of culture continued much longer. As the result of unsettled and chaotic conditions in North India, after the seventh century, many scholars and artists of the

north migrated to the south, where they could carry on their work in a calm and undisturbed atmosphere.

This decay and arrest of growth were due to a number of factors. India was subjected to foreign domination, a number of times after the fall of the Mauryan dynasty. It regained its supremacy under the Gupta rule, and rose to great heights of splendour and power. But towards the end of the Gupta period, hordes of Huns entered India in successive waves of invasion. They were defeated ultimatly by the combined armies of the last Gupta monarch and a ruler of Central India, Yaśovarmā by name. There oft-repeated and long-drawn-out conflicts made North India weak and disintegrated ; so that the Muslim conquerors, who came next, did not meet any great resistance at the hands of the divided and smaller kingdoms of India. Political subjection, extending over a long period naturally led to cultural decay, especially when the rulers happened to be of narrow and bigoted mentality, making it difficult for the culture of the land to flourish unhindered. We find the process of rejuvenation reasserting itself in the British period, but in the Muslim period, there was not much scope for the free expression of Indian genius in religious, philosophical and scientific fields. The problem of cultural and racial survival became the all-important problem of the age.

"Why should political freedom be lost unless some kind of decay has preceded it ?"[1] It

1. *Ibid*, p. 187.

is really a matter of wonder, that a huge country like India, with its vast man-power should have succumbed to a handful of foreign invaders. Of course it is true, that nationalism is a recent development, even in the West. In India it is only in the British period, that the people began to think of themselves as a nation, and even after the country has become free, a great vigilance has to be kept against all fissiparous and anti-national tendencies in the form of casteism, provincialism and communalism. But, as a rule, there was no All-India feeling in old times, and kingdoms fell one after the other before the onslaught of tough invaders, without getting any assistance from neighbouring rulers.

But India had another source of weakness in its rigid and exclusive caste system. Even within the same State, it brought about a lack of cohesion. The caste system gave stability to society, but begot political weakness. The social sense developed in the direction of the family or the caste, and was altogether lacking in national consciousness, even within the borders of the same State. At the time of war only Kṣatriyas fought. The rest of the people did not take part in fighting, or perhaps were not allowed to do so. "They were prepared to welcome any king or ruler or dynasty, Hindu or Muslim or Christian, provided they guaranteed ordered government and maintained the social liberty of each caste or community. That explains the facility, with which foreigners

conquered our country, and the apparent passivity, with which most people accepted their rule."[1]

But there was another way also, in which caste system played a part in bringing about cultural decay. As the result of caste system, more than eighty percent of people, who formed the lower classes, were denied all advantages of education, and opportunities of cultural growth and even among the higher classes the Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas, as a rule, were not much concerned with the creation and dissemination of culture. It was only the small privileged class of Brāhmaṇas who acted as the custodians of culture. Of course, there must have been a few talented and cultured people among the Kṣatriya aristocracy, but the main contribution to cultural growth came from the Brāhmaṇa class.

To the ancient law-givers, it appeared the most natural thing, that each person should do the work to which he was born, in the interest of social stability. The result was most disastrous, in so far as the large majority of people at the bottom of the social ladder were concerned, who on account of the lack of education, could not make any contribution to the growth of culture and civilization. The Brāhmaṇa class, after the cultural effort of many centuries, was overcome by mental inertia and spiritual langour, as there was no impetus or competition forthcoming from the other classes. It is generally found, that a particular class, after a certain period, loses originality

1. D. J. Souza : *Association*, Dec. 1954.

and the urge for creation, and gets into a condition of rut and formalism. At such a time, fresh vigour and creative effort are injected into society by the members of the hitherto uncreative classes. In a society, where there is no special restriction, whatsoever, on any member making his contribution to the fund of common culture the springs of originality and creativeness never dry up. In India the caste system made it impossible for the largest class of people to do any creative work except that of creating children. There is no wonder, therefore, if after a time, the cultural achievements came to a standstill, and decay set in, in all departments of cultural life.

A third factor, which made for cultural decay was the degradation of the position of women during this period. In the Vedic age and long after that, we find many distinguished ladies making rich contributions to culture. Some of them even composed the Vedic hymns, but when gradually early marriages were instituted, and the boon of education was taken away from women, they were naturally disabled from taking part in cultural efforts.

The child marriages, which became common during this period, also contributed very much to the decay of culture. In spite of the injunctions of the law-givers to the contrary, the parents, in the early centuries of the Christian era, went on marrying their daughters at the age of puberty. But by the end of the Gupta period, infant marriages became

common. The result was, that boys and girls began to engage in sexual activity, as soon as, if not before they attained the age of puberty, girls in most cases becoming mothers at the age of twelve or thirteen years, and giving birth to weak and puny children.

This premature sexual activity naturally had a most pernicious influence on physical and mental health. In this connection, the findings of Dr. J. D. Unwin in his monumental work, *Sex and Culture* should be of the greatest interest. As the result of his extensive researches carried on among peoples at different levels of culture for many years, he arrived at certain conclusions which, in the light of the wealth of detail on which they are founded, many be regarded as practically certain and incontrovertible.

His most important conclusion is, that societies, which do not observe pre-nuptial chastity, and among whom opportunities for sexual indulgence are the greatest after marriage, are always found without any exhibition of physical or mental energy. "Neither mental nor social energy can be manifested", says Dr. Unwin "except under certain conditions. These conditions arise when sexual opportunity is reduced to a minimum." Even in the same society, the group or community in which the greatest restraint is imposed upon sex, always displays the greatest energy and dominates the other groups. Aggressiveness and energetic behaviour are the characteristics of those communities, in which there is a check on pre-nuptial

sex indulgence and restriction on post-nuptial sexual opportunity by means of strict monogamy. "Some times," says Dr. Unwin "a man has been heard to declare, that he wants both to enjoy the advantages of high culture and to abolish compulsory continence. The inherent nature of human organism, however, seems to be such that these desires are incompatible, even contradictory. Any human society is free to choose, either to display great energy or to enjoy sexual freedom ; the evidence is, that it cannot do both for more than one generation."[1]

Indian society, at a certain period of her history, chose in actual practice, the alternative of sexual freedom in the form of child marriage, and by permitting polygamy, which was practised by its influential and well-to-do members in an abundant measure. The result was, that within a century or so, the Indian society lost vigour and aggressiveness, which so characteristically distinguished the Indians of the Vedic age, and the succeeding centuries. The Hindus from the advent of the Muslim rule, right up to the modern period, came to bear the epithets of mild and peaceful. The mild Hindu was the product of sexual freedom, provided by the custom of early marriage. By all accounts, that have come down to us, the Vedic ancestors of the mild Hindus were not mild or mentally and physically lethargic.

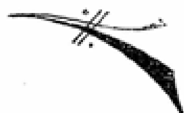
There is no reason to doubt, in the light of the scientific findings of Dr. J. D. Unwin, that the

1. Quoted by Aldous Huxley : *Ends and Means*, p. 313.

institution of early marriages amongst Hindus an was important factor leading to an all-round decay in Indian society.

The condition of decay continued throughout the medieval period. In that period, a number of saints appeared on the Indian horizon, who preached sentimental devotionalism, and the doctrine of renunciation, as a sort of escape from the unhappy condition, brought about by the Muslim rule. We also find these saints, most probably under the influence of Islam, preaching against caste system and distinctions of high and low, and a number of other reforms, but their work did not appear to have any great influence on the established social structure, and so, when we come to the modern times, we find Hindu society more or less just as it was towards the end of the first millenium of Christian era.

Before taking up the development and renaissance of Indian culture in the modern period, we shall devote a chapter to Indian culture in medieval times.



BOOK IV

Hinduism in Middle Ages

CHAPTER I

The Medieval period of Indian history can be divided into early period (800-A. D. to 1200 A. D.) and later period (1200 A. D. to 1800 A. D.). With the advent of medieval age, the pace of progressiveness gradually slackened and a drift towards decay made its appearance. Up to the end of the Gupta period, and for sometime after that, the Hindu culture gave due importance to each of the four objectives of life, Dharma and Mokṣa on the one hand, and Artha and Kāma on the other, but with the beginning of the medieval period, we find a gradually increasing emphasis on spiritual values at the expense of material values. The tendency towards renunciation and escape from worldly engagements began to make a great appeal to the thoughtful people of the age. The

cult of Sannyāsa became popular, and hundreds and thousands of people became wandering Sādhus living on alms and charity. A fairly large number of them were simply beggars and charlatans, who discovered in this type of life, a very effective way of earning money as well as respect from the pious householders.

The caste system became still more rigid. The number of sub-castes increased a hundred-fold. The Brāhmaṇas had for long remained a compact caste with practically no sub-divisions, but by the end of the first millennium, various divisions appeared among them, on occupational and regional bases. The division of Brāhmaṇas into Dvivedī, Trivedī, Caturvedī, Pāṭhaka, Upādhyāya, as well as into Gaura, Sārasvata etc. made its appearance in this age. Following the example of the Brāhmaṇas, the other castes also divided themselves into various sub-castes. The laws of inter-marriages became very strict. While up to the beginning of medieval age, intermarriages were fairly common, attempts were now made to confine them within the sub-divisions of each major caste. The boundary of each sub-caste became well-defined, so that no loop-hole was left for any non-Hindu to be admitted into any caste-group of Hinduism. In the previous centuries all racial groups, who entered India from outside were absorbed into the Hindu social system. They became Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras and occasionally Brāhmaṇas, according to their respective occupations. The caste system, though mostly hereditary, had not yet became so rigid as to exclude assimilation of foreign elements.

Consequently all the foreigners, the Greeks, the Scyathians, the Kushans, the Huns and others were completely absorbed without a remainder. This became progressively difficult as the castes and sub-castes became more and more exclusive. When Alberuni came to India in the eleventh century, he noticed that the Hindus of that age were generally opposed to the admission of non-Hindus into their religion.

The condition of women underwent a further deterioration, specially in the second half of the medieval period. Early marriages now became the order of the day. The number of child widows increased but widow-remarriage was completely banned. Before the Gupta period there were only rare instances of the custom of Satī, but it became common in the Muslim period of Indian history. A woman was not allowed to read the *Vedas* and she was classed with Śūdras in this respect. It was enjoined upon her, that she was to respect her husband like a god, even if he happend to be a drunkard, debauchee or a leper.

Impact of Islām

Many changes came into Hinduism with the advent of Islām. Unlike the other foreign invaders, the Muslims not only possessed a well-defined religion, but they were also eager to convert other people to their faith. Force and persuasion were both used for the propagation of Islām. From the 7th century onwards, the Persian and Arab traders settled down

in large numbers on the Western coast of India, and married the women of the country. They specially settled in Malābār and in Saurāṣṭra. The Hindu rulers in both these places gave them every sort of encouragement, and built mosques for them. They were allowed to practise and preach their religion without any hindrance whatsoever. "They acquired great influence both in politics and in society. On the one side their leaders became ministers, admirals, ambassadors and farmers of revenue and on the other they made many converts, propagated their religious ideas, established mosques and erected tombs, which became centres of the activities of saints and missionaries."[1] The Muslim saints followed, where-ever the Muslim traders and the Muslim rulers went. They came singly or in batches, and by their pious and austere lives exercised a great influence on the Hindus.

While the Muslim traders and saints propagated the Islāmic faith peacefully, some of the Muslim rulers, who established themselves in India after the invasions of Mahmud, freely made use of force for religious conversion. During the Muslim rule of more then six hundred years, the Hindus, off and on, barring the period of some tolerant rulers like Akbar and his two successors, were subjected to harsh discriminatory taxation, like the imposition of jazia, and various other religious and economic disabilities. The Muslim kings, who made a speciality of coercion for religious

1. Tara Chand : *The Advent of the Muslims in India*, p. 43.

propagation, were Feroze Shah Tuglak (1351-88), Sikandar Lodi (1488-1517), and Aurangzeb (1659-1707). In Kashmir, Sikandar, who ruled from 1394 to 1416, forcibly converted a large number of Hindus to Islām. Principal Siri Ram in his excellent booklet *Conversion and Reconversion*, has given a number of instances of Muslims being converted or reconverted to Hinduism. This specially happened in the beginning of Muslim rule, but the process of conversion could not be continued for long. In the first place, the Hindus had lost the power of assimilation, as a consequence of their numerous caste divisions, and secondly the conversion of Muslims to Hinduism was looked upon with extreme disfavour by the Muslim rulers and was, as a rule, followed by severe punishment. It led to a strange reaction among the Hindu leaders of the age. They gradually adopted the view, that Hinduism was a non-missionary religion, and nobody could be a Hindu, unless he was born as such. It was propounded, that it was not a small matter to be a Hindu, and that one was born a Hindu only after he had performed good deeds in many previous lives. It became a privilege to be a Hindu ; so a person would think twice, before he gave up his ancestral religion. He knew that he would, afterwards, never be allowed to become a Hindu again, and will have to remain a Mleccha for the rest of his life, with the dismal prospect of being sent to hell after death. The caste system was made still more rigid. It became like a fort, so that no one could

penetrate it from outside, nor could any one, who once went out of it enter into it again. It is said, and may probably be true, that it was caste system made rigid, which saved Hinduism from being assimilated to Islām — a fate, which had overtaken non-Muslims in other countries.

It is one of the strange phenomena of the world, that the low-caste Śūdras and the untouchables in India, whose lot was unenviable in every respect, did not embrace Islām in a whole-sale manner, when they could easily raise their social status by so doing. Of course, a fairly large number of them did become Muslims, either individually or in groups. It is very difficult to know, how much of this business of conversion was the result of force in one form or another. Other motives like greed and sex also played a part. Some of these people might have become voluntary converts to escape the social tyranny to which they had been subjected in Hinduism, and a few of them might have been drawn by the noble lives of the Muslim saints and darveshes. But there is every reason to believe that the main cause of the relinquishment of Hindu religion, on the part of these men and others, was coercion, or expulsion from Hinduism through infringement of caste rules. In the modern period, when there is practically no coercion, we find very few people becoming Muslims or Christians, though their status in Hinduism continues to be the same. Even those few, who embrace other religions, are mostly drawn to them by temptations of marriage or by

prospects of ecocomic amelioration, and very seldom by the attraction of religion itself.

The question can be repeated, why did the low caste Śūdras and the untouchables continue to stick on to their highly uncomfortable position in Hindu society. It seems, they were contented with their lot in Hinduism, because they firmly believed that it was the result of their own deeds in the previous lives, and that they could get to a nobler birth next time, if they performed their caste duties in a conscientious manner. The doctrine of Karma undoubtedly played, and even now plays a great part in the life of an average Hindu. But this alone could not have been enough to keep them contented perpetually with their low social and economic condition.

There arose at this time saints and many religious reformers, who preached the doctrine of devotion and religious equality, in the language of the common people. These saints and reformers composed devotional songs of great emotional fervour, and thereby profoundly influenced all strata of Hindu society. The beautiful teachings of these saintly reformers did, in the opinion of the author of this book, endear Hinduism even to the people of lower castes.

There is no doubt, that many of these reformers were influenced by the teachings of Islām. The idea of brotherhood of man, belief in monotheism, and complete surrender to God's will, which are so characteristic of Islām, left a deep impression on some of these reformers, and coloured their thoughts and teachings.

From the 8th century onwards, the religious leadership of the country passed from North to South India. After the death of Harśa in the 8th century, North India was split up into a large number of small principalities under the suzerainty of Rājapūta princes, who were generally at war with one another. Political unity was lost and there was chaos and disintegration everywhere, so that when the Muslim invaders came after two centuries, they could easily overrun the whole country, destitute as it was of any united leadership. Naturally under these disordered conditions, no constructive work of any kind could be carried on. Dr. Tarachand says, "From the 8th century to the 15th, the South is the home of religious reform. It is there that the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints start the schools of Bhakti, and Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, Nimbāditya, Bāsava, Vallabhācārya and Madhva expound the philosophical systems. From the South impulse was transmitted to the North through Rāmānanda, a pupil of Rāmānuja."[1] Previous to the 8th century, the religious missionaries of the North, and at various times brought to the South, teachings of Buddhism and Jainism as well as Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava teachings. By about the 8th century the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects had largely dislodged both Buddhism and Jainism, and taken their place in the religious life of the people. During this period in the South, the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints succeeded in turning the minds of common people towards the

1. *The Influence of Islām on Indian Culture*, p. 84.

worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu by means of their charming poems composed in popular languages. "They took over from Buddhism its devotionalism, its sense of the transitoriness of the world, its conceptions of human worthlessness, its suppression of desires and asceticism as also its ritual, the worship of idols, and stupas, or lingams, temples, pilgrimages, fasts and monastic rules and its idea of the spiritual equality of all castes; from Jainism they took its ethical tone, and its respect for animal life."[1] These saints known as Adiyars (Śaiva saints) and the Alvars (Vaiṣṇava saints) flourished between 7th and 12th centuries. Their works are pervaded with warm devotional feeling, and are looked upon with great reverence and admiration by the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva devotees. They made current among people, the practical religion of love and devotion, and deprecated the external ritualistic paraphernalia, and sometimes idol worship also. They also preached the equality of all people, irrespective of their caste, creed or worldly position. Though the elements of Bhakti, self-surrender and theism are found in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the *Upaniṣads* and Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is quite possible, that contact with Islām, in this period, might have played some part in moulding the devotional aspects in the teachings of the saints of the South, in simplifying the practical side of religion, and in establishing the monotheistic tendency in a well-defined form. It is sometimes said that Saṅkara,

1. *Ibid*, p. 86.

Rāmānuja and other thinkers of this period, were influenced more or less by the monotheistic doctrines of Islām, but there is no evidence, direct or indirect, to this effect. It is of course true that in medieval times, monotheism became the prevailing religion of India, and the one God is called Viṣṇu, Śiva and by other names.

The Bhakti movement was made popular, in the North, by Rāmānand in the 14th century. God was worshipped by Rāmānanda, under the name of Rāma, and he admitted to his sect people from all castes without any distinction. Some Mohemadans also became his disciples. Kabīra, the most famous of them all, taught the religion of Bhakti to all classes of people. In his eyes, asceticism, fasting and other externalia of religion had no value, if they were not accompanied by purity of life and deep devotion to the Lord. He attacked the superstitious practices of both Hindus and Muslims, and taught them to be tolerant of one another. He calls his God, indifferently, by the names of Hari, Rāma, Khudā, Sāhib, Allāh, Gobinda and by some other names also. He dwells again and again on the necessity of a Guru or spiritual teacher for obtaining divine illumination. "He asked the Hindus to give up, what every refomer since the days of Buddha had insisted upon, ceremonial sacrifice, lust for magical powers, pilgrimages, fasts, worship of idols, gods and goddesses, Brāhmaṇa supremacy, caste differences, prejudices concerning touchability and food. He openly con-

demned the doctrine of incarnations."[1] He asked the Mussalmans and the Hindus to live together like brothers. He repeated again and again, that both the Hindus and Mussalmans worship the same God, and are children of the same Father. He was the first reformer in India, who tried to reconcile the two religions by emphasizing their common points. His influence extends over the whole of Northern India and both Hindus and Mussalmans revere his noble memory.

The Pañjāba gave birth to a great religious leader in the fifteenth century. Guru Nānaka laid the foundations of the Sikha religion, which gradually gathered force under the succeeding Gurus, till it assumed a martial form under the leadership of Gobinda Singh, the last Guru of the Sikhas. Of all the sects, which arose in India at this time, Sikhism is perhaps the only one, which has not decayed with the lapse of time. Though the number of its adherents is not large, it had a marked effect on the Hindus, especially of the Pañjāba and the neighbouring areas.

Guru Nānaka, the founder of Sikhism was deeply religious man. He preached the worship of one God and the brotherhood of man. Dwelling on the essence of religion, he unhesitatingly condemned the superstitions of both Hindus and Mussalmans. He denounced the inequalities of caste system, and disapproved the worship of images, the practices of fasting, going on pilgrimages or retiring to forests in

1. *Ibid*, p. 163.

search of mental peace. In the moral sphere, he advocated the middle path between extreme asceticism and heedless satisfaction of sense. He was never tired of praising virtue and condemning vice. We get an idea of his notion of a virtuous life from the following verse.

"Practise humility, renounce pride, restrain the mind, remember God. Be honest, watch, restrain the five evil passions, be content."

He accepted the doctrine of the transmigration of soul, and believed that the people, who led a sinful life will have to suffer the torments of repeated deaths and births. The final emancipation was as much the result of one's own good deeds as of divine grace and mercy. Nānaka, like other reformers of this age, believed in the necessity of a preceptor or a Guru for spirtual enlightenment.

Great saints and teachers arose in other parts of the country also, Śrī Caitanya in Bengal and Nāmadeva, Jñāneśvara and Tukārāma in Mahārāṣṭra gave the same message of divine worship and religious equality of all men, to their followers. To Śrī Caitanya's sect were attracted men of all castes and religions Hindus and Mussalmans were both equally welcome to the religious sect founded by Śri Caitanya.

The movements started by these teachers were progressive movements, and there is a distinct influence of Islām visible in them. The work of

reform thus initiated was carried on by Dādu in the 16th century, and by other poets and teachers like Caraṇadāsa, born in 1703 and Rāma Caraṇa born in 1718. The latter was the founder of the Rāma Sanehī order, the members of which do not worship idols. In the later part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, flourished Sahjamal, Bhika, Dulan Das etc. The movement of reform started by Rāmānanda and Kabīra in the 14th and 15th centuries, spread with great force all over India, but by the end of the 18th century, it had lost much of its original force, and had practically spent itself. For about a century, there is darkness and spiritual vacuum in the country, till we come to the period of modern renaissance by about the middle of the 19th century.

Hinduism and Islām

In course of time, as the Muslim sovereignty in India became an established fact, and the Hindus and the Muslims began to appreciate and understand each other's points of view, various common traits and habits of living were developed. Both Hindus and Muslims lived together peacefully, except when now and then, a bigoted ruler committed atrocities on members of the alien faith, and thereby marred the good-neighbourly relations between the two communities. This became less common as time passed, and the two communities adopted many admirable and fine things from each other. The Hindu Sardārs adopted the dress and manners of the

Muslim noblemen. The Muslim poets Amir Khushro, Ras Khan and others, wrote Hindi poetry, and many Hindu scholars wrote very good works in Persian. Both the Hindus and the Muslims took part in the celebration of each other's festivals. Mixed styles of architecture, painting and music came into being, and gave birth to some of the finest artistic productions. Under the patronage of the Muslim kings in Bengal and Mahārāṣṭra, the vernaculars of these lands were given great encouragement. Great books like *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhāgavata* were tranlated into Bengali, and similar translations in Indian languages appeared in other places. In the 16th century, Urdū was born, which was really Hindi appreciably transformed by the addition of Persian and Arabian idiom and vocabulary. It was an exhibition of Hindu-Muslim interaction in the domain of language.

The Effect of Islām on Hinduism

We have already referred to the rise of a number of new sects in Hinduism as the result of the impact of Islām. Their emphasis on the notion of one sole God, supreme and omnipresent, and their condemnation of polytheism, idolatry and caste system may be traced to Islāmic influences. The Muslim rule gave a great impetus to extending the area of pilgrimages. Before the Muslim rule, the pilgrims hardly went to remote sacred places, but in Muslim times, pilgrimages assumed an almost national character. The pilgrims began to visit sacred places all over India. Puri, in

Orissa, attracted pilgrims from all parts of the country. It became a sort of Mecca of Hinduism.

There is another development in Hinduism, which may be traced to the same source, and it is the exaggerated importance to the need of a Guru or spiritual guide, which began to be given in medieval Hinduism. Almost all the Hindu sects, which arose at this time dwelt upon this aspect of religion. Hinduism in its long course of pre-Muslim development hardly attached any importance to personalities. "In fact the Hindu mind was both too mythological and too philosophical, to be content with a late discovery of truth by a single individual, and every new religion was soon driven to assert its own eternity, defined either in immutability or as constant renewal."[1]

Islām had a personal and historical character. The founder was revered as a prophet of God. In the Shia sects of Islām, there are the Imāms or spiritual guides, who are highly honoured. In the new sects of Hinduism also, especially in the Vaiṣṇava sects, the founders are regarded little inferior to Kṛṣṇa himself and may even be identified with him. Kabīra, Nānaka and Caitanya especially have lavished the highest praise on spiritual Gurus.

The Influence of Hinduism on Islām

A notable influence of Hinduism on Islām is seen in the development of Sūfism amongst the Muslim

1. Thomas : *Mutual Influence of Mohemedans and Hindus in India, p. 93.*

mystics. Nobody has any doubt these days, that apart from other influences, the influence of Hinduism on the thought and practice of Sūfism has been very great. The Hindu conceptions found a home in Persia, and from there influenced Islām after its advent in that country. There are certain important points of contact between Sūfism and *Vedānta* which deserve mention. "In the first place, the great *Vedānta* doctrine of Advaita, non-duality is found also in the tenets of Sūfism, which hold that God alone exists ; and besides Him there is no reality. Secondly they conceive of the world as the reflection of God, who beholds His own beauty in the mirror of illusion, becoming thus manifest in a series of multitudinous appearances. This is the *māyā* or illusion of the Vedāntists, who make use of this very image of the mirror, an image, which we may also trace in the Enneads of Plotinus. Thirdly the comparison of God to light, absolute light, absolute brightness is common to both the Hindu and Mohemadan mysticism. Further points of resemblance, which should rather be discribed as borrowings from Hinduism, are the beliefs in transmigration and incarnation, and the resulting practice of abstention from animal food. Even the peculiarly Hindu religious exercise of restraining the breath was copied by some at any rate of the Indian Mussalmans."[1] Sūfism is very much resented by the strict followers of Islām. It goes against Muslim conception of the personality of God, and the historical

1. *Ibid, p. 86.*

character of Islām. But it has exercised a great influence on the Muslim mind, and the Sūfis are held in great veneration.

During Muslim rule, as Thomas points out, many new sects sprang up in Islām, which show the influence of Hindu beliefs and practices. One such sect called the Ismailyah sect gave birth in India to the sect of the Khojas, whose doctrines are a mixture of the Shiā and Vaiṣṇava tenets, and who hold that Ali is the tenth incarnation of Viṣṇu. They have their own separate places of worship, and do not attend the mosque. Again the followers of another Muslim sect, known as Ali-Ilahiyahs, believe in transmigration of souls and do not take animal flesh.

The worship of saints and pīrs among the Muslims may be the Hindu influence, and this kind of worship is found both among the Shiās and Sunnīs. These Muslim saints and pīrs, whose number is legion, bear a great resemblance to Hindu gods, both local and national. "The honours which are paid to them, the processions and pilgrimages to their tombs and offerings of rice, clarified butter and flowers are of unmistakably Hindu origin." In Sindh there are pīrs who bear Hindu names and are venerated by Hindu and Muslims alike.

There are many Muslims, especially among the ignorant classes, who are such only in name, and cling to their former beliefs and ancient rites. In Bengal, the Muslim proselytes carried on the worship of

Durgā and Kṛṣṇa, and other Hindu practices. In the case of Mevas, the Brāhmaṇas perform certain ceremonies, preliminary to marriage, and they still follow many Hindu customs. Their village gods are the same as those of Hindus and they observe Holī, Divālī and other Hindu festivals. There are thus many Mussalman groups of considerable numerical strength scattered all over India, in which some of the old Hindu beliefs and usages still persist. We may regard these people as lying on the border-land between Hinduism and Islām.

Literature and Science

In the first half of the medieval period, were written a number of good books on poetry, drama, rhetorics and philosophy. In the domain of science, books on Medicine. Mathematics and Astronomy deserve mention. Brahma Gupta and Bhāskarācārya are the two well-known astronomers and mathematicians of this period. Līlāvatī is a well-known treatise of Bhāskarācārya on Mathematics, written in the 12th century. He also wrote *Graha-Gaṇitādhyāya* and *Golādhyāya* on the subject of Astronomy. In these books, there is a clear exposition of the law of gravitation. He has thus anticipated Newton by about five centuries. He also lays down the view that the earth is round in shape. It is really strange, how knowledge is discovered and rediscovered in course of ages. The discoveries of the gravitational force and the round shape of the earth in later centuries in Europe were really rediscoveries in the world of science.

Similarly a number of original works in medicine as well as commentaries on the old masters were written during this period. Vāgbhatta and Cakrapāṇi Datta among others, wrote works on Medicine. There are books on Veterinary science also, in Sanskrit, especially on the diseases of horses and elephants. Most of these books are no longer available. It is only from their mention in other books, that their existence has become known.

During this period, the Prākrit and Apabhraṁśa literature shows progress. Prākrit represents the transformation of Sanskrit in differnt parts of the country. There are four distinct Prākrits, Māgadhī, Śaurasenī, Mahārāṣṭrī and Paiśācī. Out of these the Mahārāṣṭrī Prākrit has a large literature to its credit. Apabhaṁśas are the forms assumed by Prākrits in later times, and from these have emerged the modern Indian languages such as Hindī, Gujarātī, Bengālī, Marāṭhī etc. In the later half of the medieval period, literature in modern Indian languages makes its appearance. From now on Sanskrit takes the back seat and modern Indian languages become the chief vehicle of literary expression.

As already indicated, medieval period is a period of decay. Excepting a few books on science and literature, most of the books are mere commentaries. In Philosophy Śaṅkara is the greatest name of this period, most of the others being mere commentators, with no freshness or originality in thought. We do not similarly come across any new books on law. There are

only commentaries on the ancient law-books. With very few exceptions, "There was decline all along the line—intellectual, philosophical, political, in technique and methods of warfare, in knowledge of and contacts with the outside world, and there was a growth of local sentiment and feudal and small-group feeling at the expense of the larger conception of India as a whole."[1] It is only in art, that progress continues right up to the 14th century. According to Havell, the Indian art attained perfection in the 7th and 8th centuries, when most of the sculpture and painting was produced. India saw great specimens of the art of architecture during this period. The great buildings and gardens, such as the Tāj Mahal at Āgrā, and the great Mogal gardens of Kashmir are the creations of this period.

The tendency towards decay continued throughout the medieval period. A very laudable attempt was made by the saints and poets of this period to raise the people from the slough of despond, but they met with only a partial success. In the field of religion, their success was remarkable. The use of Indian languages as vehicles for religious propagation, the purity of their lives, their sincerity and transparent love for mankind, their insistence on the equality of all and their denunciation of caste system, had an electrifying effect on the Indian people. They made religion and Indian mythology so attractive, that even the low caste Śūdras and untouchables felt drawn

1. Jawahar Lal Nehru : *The Discovery of India*, p. 189.

towards them. There is no doubt that the work of these saints and reformers played a great part in preventing wholesale conversions of lower castes to Islām. The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulasīdāsa was another important work in this period, which endeared Hindu Dharma with all its faults, to all classes of Hinduism. The poems of Mīrān Bāi had an equally mellowing and ennobling effect on the Hindu masses. But the influence of these religious reformers did not lost long. As we approach the beginning of the modern period, we find a wave of pessimism and uncertainty passing over the whole of Indian society. The loss of political and legislative power, continuous exposure, for centuries, to the humiliation of foreign domination had sapped the springs of originality and self-respect from the Indian people. Apathy and indifference took the place of enthusiasm and pride of creative effort. The various sects founded by the great reformers of this period lost their inspiring power. Dr. Thomas says, "The followers of Caitanya and Kabīra have almost completely sunk back into the general body of Vaiṣṇavism......Caste is everywhere reappearing or strengthening its bonds, and though there are still bodies of Vaiṣṇavites in Bengal, who theoretically reject it, yet there are few, which show no traces of its return. Similarly the Sikhs, the followers of Nānaka, though caste was strenuously denounced by their founder, his immediate successors are gradually restoring it along with other practices of Hinduism......We are thus compelled to recognize

......that the levelling doctrine is attaining no more permanent success in India, than did the law of Buddha, and Brāhmaṇism is till strong in the heart of its offspring, Hinduism."[1]



1. *The Mutual Influence of Mohamadans and Hindus*, p. 94.

BOOK V

Modern Period

Renaissance in Hinduism

The modern period begins with the onset of the 19th century. The reform movements of the medieval age had practically exhausted themselves before the end of the 18th century. The old conservative forces reasserted themselves, and it appeared as if the work of the reformers and saints of the medieval period had all been in vain, but with the turn of the century, we find the emergance of a new spirit triumphing over the forces of darkness and conservatism, and ushering a new era of progress and go-aheadness.

The British supremacy had been established practically over the whole of India by the end of the 18th century. The country, for the first time, became the dependency of a foreign power. Many invaders came to India from time to time in previous centuries. They ruled the country for some time,

but were ultimately defeated into the social structure of the Hindus. The Muslim rulers, though they did not adopt Hinduism, nevertheless made India their home, and the Indian people ceased, after a time, to look upon them as foreigners. The British rulers, on the other hand, throughout their stay of about two hundred years in India, remained as foreigners, exploiting the wealth of the country, and keeping themselves aloof from all contacts with the Indian people. India became progressively poor during the British regime. Its industries gradually faded away, and no efforts were made to set up industries of the modern type, in place of the old industries, which could no longer compete with the machine-made goods turned out in the factories of England and other Western countries. India's role, now, was to supply raw produce to England, to be converted into finished industrial articles, which were resold in India at high prices. In pre-British days, India was known all over the world for its large vareity of manufactured goods, which were exported to foreign countries. It made India prosperous. The British rulers discouraged the industries of India, and converted it into a market for the industrial commodities, produced in England. In many other ways also, there was a drain on the wealth of the country. The result was that India, which was once the land of many flourshing industries, became, in course of time, one of the poorest countries of the world, living barely upon the produce of the land.

But the British connection brought about a gain also. The number of Englishmen, who came out to India was not large. They required Indians to fill up the subordinate services, and thus help the British to carry on successfully the administration of this vast country. They did not understand the languages of the Indian people, and so they had to adopt the policy of educating Indians in the English language, so that the latter could also serve as intermediaries between themselves and the Indian population. The British rulers did not really want to extend to the Indians the benefits of Western ideas, but they wanted clerks for their various establishments and offices, and were, therefore, forced much against their will to impart English education to some of the Indians. Many printing presses were also set up in big cities for official business, and a number of newspapers came to be published from 1780 onwards. The Western missionaries started a number of English schools and newspapers for the propagation of the Christian faith. There also came to India many Englishmen of enlightened and liberal views, who did a great deal to spread Western culture amongst Indian. Fortunately there were also many Indians of whom Rājā Rāma Mohana Rai was the greatest, who were deeply impressed by the value of Western education, and used their influence to persuade the Government to open schools and colleges in a large number, for the teaching of Western science and literature. It was Macaulay, who finally succeeded in 1835 in changing

the policy of the Government in favour of English Education. In 1857 the Universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay came into existence.

All these factors combined to disseminate modern ideas of the West more and more among the educated classes of India. English education led to the widening of their mental horizon. It thus proved to be one of the most potent means of awakening the Indian mind from its slumber. It brought it in contact with Western science, Western literature and Western history. "The new world of ideas revealed itself to the wondering gaze of our young students in schools and colleges. In place of the extravagant mythical Geography, legendary History and pseudo-science, with which they had been acquainted, come sober and correct ideas about the configuration of the Earth, the rise and fall of nations, and the unalterable laws of nature. In the light of this new knowledge, many an evil custom in Hindu society hitherto regarded as a decree of God appeared in its true colour, as the folly of man. Satī, infanticide, enforced widowhood, child marriage, untouchability, Pardāh, the institution of Deva-Dāsīs, caste system, and prohibition of foreign travels began to lose their tyrannical hold on the mind of Hindus, and reformers arose, who were determined to purge the society of these evils."[1]

But this new knowledge, combined with the

1. D. S. Sharma : *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, p. 68.

onslaughts of Christian missionaries on Hindu religion, produced in the beginning, in many educated Hindus, a mood of scepticism in regard to their religion and a leaning towards Christian religion. Pandit Jawahar Lal writes, "The first reaction, limited to a small English-educated class was one of admiration and acceptance of about everything Western. Repelled by some of the social customs and practices of Hinduism, many Hindus were attracted towards Christianity, and some notable conversions took place in Bengal."[1]

Influence of Great Indians

Rājā Rāma Mohana Roy of Bengal was the first eminent Indian, who rose equal to the occasion, and while trying to purge Hinduism of social evils and superstitious beliefs, stuck to the best elements of Hindu religion. With this object in view, he laid the foundation of Brahma-Samāja in 1824. For some time, he was engaged in controversies with the Christian missionaries, who tried to belittle Hinduism to the advantage of Christianity. He strongly felt the rudeness, shown by some of the missionaries in their attacks on Hinduism, and wrote in one of his papers as follows. "It seems almost natural, that when one nation succeeds in conquering another, the former, though their religion may be quite ridiculous, laugh at and despise the religion and manners of those, that are fallen into their power. For example, Mussalmans, upon their conquest of

1. *The Discovery of India*, p. 289.

India, proved highly inimical to the religious exercises of Hindus."[1]

Rājā Rāma Mohana Roy made *Upaniṣads* the basis of his theistic movement. He did not want to break away from Hinduism, but only wanted to restore it to its original purity. He preached the pure thiesm of the *Upaniṣads* and was against idol worship in all its forms. He lays down in the trust deed of the Brahma-Samāja, that "No graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait or the likeness of anything shall be admitted within the said building." But he was not in favour of reviling or showing disrespect to the modes of worship followed by other religions.

He was a great advocate of social reform. He carried on a persistent agitation against the cruel custom of Satī, till it was finally declared illegal in 1829 by Lord William Bentick. He pleaded strongly for raising the condition of women and for abolishing caste system with its innumerable divisions and sub-divisions.

Though the personal influence of Rājā Rāma Mohana Roy in the field of religious, social and educational reform was very great, the Brahma-Samāja, which he founded, remained confined to only a few people of Bengal. It has even now a very scanty following in the country. Rājā Rāma Mohana Roy founded it on the theism of the *Upaniṣads*, but his successors gradually made it an eclectic religion,

1. Quoted by D. S. Sharma in *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, p. 76.

deriving inspiration from the scriptures of all prominent religions. Having its roots cut off from the original soil of its birth, it lost sympathies of almost all people, the educated and the uneducated alike, and most of its old adherents went back to the ancient teachings of *Vedānta.*

A number of other great men arose in India in the second half of the 19th century. They exercised a tremendous influence on the minds of the people, raised their morale and gave them a new insight into the essentials of Hindu culture.

Svāmī Vivekānanda was the illustrious disciple of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Parama-Haṁsa, the great saint of Bengal. He was a powerful orator, full of fiery energy and a passion to spread the gospel of Indian *Vedānta* throughout the world. He visited the Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, and his very first speech made him famous throughout America. His addresses in the Parliament of Religions were reproduced in the American papers and his life-size pictures displayed at all important places in Chicago. "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions" wrote the New York Herald, "after hearing him, we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation." Vivekānanda was only a thirty years of age, when he attended the Parliament of Religions at Chicago.

He spent over a year in the U.S.A. and then travelled to England. From there he visited a number of countries in Europe. Wherever he went, he

was acclaimed as a great teacher of religion. People flocked to his lectures and many learned and notable men and women of both America and England became his disciples. Mrs. and Mr. Sevier, who were among these disciples, dedicated their fortune and themselves to the cause of *Vedānta*. They came to India along with him, founded the Advaita Āśrama at Māyāvatī in Almora hills, and spent the rest of their lives there rendering every help they could, in furthering the work of Svāmī Vivekānanda.

Svāmī Vivekānanda preached the Advaita system of *Vedānta* to the Western audiences. According to him it was the most rational system of religion, in harmony with the findings of science. "This universe" he said, "has not been created by any extra-cosmic God, nor is it the work of any outside genius. It is self-creating, self-dissolving, self-manifesting, one infinite existence, the Brahma. Man is the highest manifestation of the divine, and the true God-vision consists in seeing God in man. In the service and love of man lies the true worship of God."

He felt, that without a strong material foundation culture could not exist. He said many a time, that what India wanted was not religion but bread. He told the Americans, that they could serve the people of India best not by sending missionaries to them, but by trying to save their bodies from starvation. True progress could only come by combining the material prosperity of the West with the spiritual teachings of India.

Vivekānanda proclaimed the truth of all religions. "We believe not only in universal toleration" he said, "but we accept all religions as true." At another time he said, "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become a Christian. But each religion must assimilate the spirit of the others, and yet preserve its individuality, and grow according to its own law of growth."

After a stay of about four years in the West, he returned to India in 1897. He was accorded a royal welcome, wherever he went, in his triumphal march through the length and breadth of India. He had come back as a conquering hero, having made as it were, a cultural conquest of the West. The Indians felt proud of him. He restored to them their tottering faith in themselves, and roused their flagging spirits. They were no longer ashamed of their culture. They felt, as the result of the glorious work of the Svāmī in the West, that whatever progress the West might have made in science and political organisation, in philosophy and religion, no nation could match with them. The work of Vivekānanda raised the Indians in their self-estimation. and made real men of them.

A passing reference may be made here to the work of the Theosophical movement in India. The Theosophical Society was founded in Adyar near Madras in 1886, but its popularity among Indians, especially in in South-India was mainly due to the efforts of Mrs. Anne Besant, who came to India in 1893 and afterwards made India her home. She dressed herself like an

Indian and adopted Hindu ways of life, and for the rest of her long life advocated the cause of Hinduism in India and abroad; by means of lectures and writings. She was a gifted writer, and an eloquent speaker. She loved Hinduism with great ardour, and used to say, that though born as an Englishwoman, she was a Hindu in her previous birth. "For over a generation, she travelled up and down this vast country besides making voyages to Europe, America and Australia, delivering innumerable lectures, rousing Indians to a sense of the greatness of their relation and organizing every form of activity which would make India once again as great as she had been in ancient times."[1]

She exercised a great fascination on the minds of the educated Hindus. "Is it surprizing" says Valentime Chirol speaking of the work of Anne Besant, "That Hindus should turn their backs upon civilization, when a European of highly trained intellectual power, and with an extraordinary gift of eloquence comes and tells them, that it is they, who possessed the key to supreme wisdom, that their gods, their philosophy, their morality are on higher plane of thought than the West has ever reached."[2]

The Theosophical movement under Anne Besant did a great service in stemming the wave of utter scepticism, which was sweeping over the educated Hindu youngmen, and in creating in them a feeling of self-respect and a sense of pride in their culture. But

1. *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, pp. 203-204.
2. *The Indian Unrest*, p. 29.

in their overenthusiasm for everything Hindu, the leaders of Theosophical Society justified every Hindu belief, practice and institution, however absurd and fantastic it might have been. They gave so-called scientific reasons for caste system, for child marriage, for offering water and food to the souls of the dead, and for other Hindu rites and ceremonies, and even for untouchability. They did not make any distinction between the lofty aspects of Hinduism and the later-day accretions, which had defaced the fair name of Hinduism for so many centuries.

The Theosophical Society lost much of its popularity among the educated people, later on, by proclaiming its faith in occultism and various clairvoyant practices. Some of its leaders claimed to have discovered, by their special methods, the past and future lives of some of the members of Theosophical Society. They said for instance, that Colonel Olcott one of the founders of Theosophical Society was the Emperor Aśoka in one of his previous births and Mrs. Besant was Hypatia in the 4th century Bruno in the 16th century. These and many other extravagant and fanciful statements led to a decline in the popularity of Mrs. Anne Besant as well as of the Theosophical Society, of which she was the head.

Dayānanda and Ārya-Samāja. Of all the great reformers of India in modern times, Dayānanda perhaps contributed the most to purifying Hinduism of social evils and religious superstitions, and to reviving in the

English-educated youngmen and women of that age, a sense of pride in the greatness of Indian culture. As already indicated, their faith in Hinduism had been greatly shaken as the result of English education, and the attacks of Christian missionaries, who at this time did most of the educational work as well. "Dayānanda Sarasvatī" says Śrī K. M. Munshi, the present Governor of Uttara Pradesha, "was the first great architect of modren India. His learning was stupendous. But above all his vision was clearer and broader than is generally given to nation makers. In the new Hinduism of today, in the Indian nationalism ... ... in the method of Mahātmā Gāndhī, we can trace the influence of Svāmījī's unerring vision and statesmanship." Before Svāmī Dayānanda began his work the Brahma-Samāja under Rāma Mohana Roy had entered the field of social and religious reform. It carried on a vigorous campaign for social reform, but it owed its origin to the influence of Western education, and therefore it had no means of establishing the credentials of Hindu religion in the minds of educated youngmen. The mere eradication of social evils and religious superstitions could not restore Hinduism to a position of prestige, if it were taken for granted, that those social evils and religious superstitions were an inseparable part of it.

While most of the reformers of this age received their inspiration from Western education, Svāmī Dayānanda based his teaching entirely upon the ancient religious literature of India, especially of the

Vedic age. He made a deep study of the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* as well as of *Purāṇas* and other later works. He authoritatively declared that the social evils like caste system, untouchability, and child-marriage were no essential part of Hinduism. He denounced idol-worship and repudiated the *Purāṇas* as the works of decadent times and once again restored the *Vedas* to the position of pre-eminence, as the religious scripture of the Hindus. He showed that the *Vedas*, the highest religious scriptures of Hindus did not give the least support to superstitious practices and social evils, which had crept into Hindu society at a later age.

It was a most welcome revelation to the young people educated in Western literature and science, that the highest religious thought of India had no place for the prevalent customs and superstitions of Hinduism. It was a great revolution, that Dayānanda wrought in the social and religious thought of Hindu India. As Śrī Jayaswal puts it, "the present reformed and rejuvenated Hinduism is solely the gift of Dayānanda Sarasvatī." As he moved from place to place, delivering his powerful discourses, and challenging the orthodox Paṇdits to hold religious discussion with him, his movements and activities were reported in most of the important papers of India. In this way his ideas and teachings came to exercise a great influence on the minds of the people in almost all parts of the country. Svāmī Dayānanda did not know English. He derived his ideas from his own

thinking and observation and from ancient Sanskrit literature. Yet he was one of the most advanced thinkers of his time, in some respects even more liberal than many English-educated people. In the modern period, Dayānanda was the first person to tell the people, that Hinduism had been a great missionary religion in the past. Every school-boy now knows that all the races and peoples of foreign origin, who came to India from time to time before the advent of the Muslims were absorbed into Hinduism, but this knowledge it seems was not available eighty or ninety years ago, and it came to be erroneously believed that a Hindu could only be born as such, and therefore no outsider could be taken into the Hindu-fold. This wrong notion was dissipated by Dayānanda, and as a matter of fact a number of Muslims were converted to the Hindu faith in the lifetime of Svāmī Dayānanda.

Svāmī Dayānanda established a very dynamic organization known as the Ārya-Samāja, which carries on the work started by him. It has established a large number of educational institutions all over Northern India both for boys and girls. Orphanages have been opened to give shelter to helpless children. When there is a famine, an earth-quake or any other calamity, the Ārya-Samāja sends its workers to render help to the suffering people. When in 1923, the Moplahs of Malābār rose in rebellion, and forcibly converted hundreds of Hindus to Islām, the Ārya-Samājists of the Pañjāba collected funds,

sent their workers to far-off Malābār, and brought back to Hinduism the men and women, who had been converted to Islām. The Ārya-Samāja was the only body, before Mahātmā Gāndhī took up the cause of the untouchables, which was trying to reclaim them, and get them recognized as equal members of Hindu society. The missionaries of the Ārya-Samāja carry on a ceaseless fight against the accumulated superstitions of the common people, and preach to them what they consider to be the essential principles of Hinduism.

The reformers, whom we have mentioned so far, did not start any movement for achieving political independence. They worked for the eradication of social evils, religious superstitions, and other hindrances in the way of creating an atmosphere of freedom, fearlessness and self-reliance. They gave a message of hope and self-confidence, and preached an optimistic view of life. The restoration of the sense of dignity and the spirit of self-respect and national unity inevitably led to the awakening of a desire for political freedom. In 1885, was founded the great political organization, the Indian National Congress, which was ultimately destined to lead India to political emancipation. For a number of years, the Indian National Congress confined itself to ventilating political grievances and demanding political rights, under the aegis of the British Empire. In 1905 for the first time, in a session of the Congress held at Calcutta, the attainment of Svarāja or self-government was made

the goal of India's political struggle, and since then efforts for overthrowing the foreign domination continued to be made in different ways, till in 1919 the leadership of the Congress passed into the hands of Mahātmā Gāndhī. It was a turning point in the history of the Indian struggle for independence. Mahātmā Gāndhī invented a new method of political warfare, which he called Satyāgraha or civil disobedience. Frail and thin physically, he was an embodiment of indomitable will, undaunted heroism, and supreme self-sacrifice. There was no place for hatred or violence in the movement started by him. People very soon discovered, that he was perfectly serious in his insistence on non-violence as a political method, and they learnt to respond to his call. During the many civil disobedience movements, which he led from time to time, there were very few cases of violence, and the whole world wondered at the success of the non-violent battle for independence waged by him against the British rule in India. Mahātmā Gāndhī's movement roused unparallel enthusiasm in the country. People became fearless, and intensely liberty-conscious, and they came in thousands; men and women alike, and members of all communities, to offer themselves for arrest and to make tremendous sacrifices for the freedom of their country. He made heroes of common people, and taught them a new lesson of human dignity and freedom.

India is a vast country, and there is no lack of man-power. The cause of the enslavement of India

was not lack of heroism or the scantiness of the number of its defenders against foreign conquest. It was lack of the spirit of unity, which brought about the down-fall of India. Gāndhī united the people of India in the common struggle for freedom, roused in them a strong desire for political freedom, and a readiness to undergo all kinds of sufferings and hardships for achieving the goal. A nation of the size of India, united in its determination to be free, and prepared to make the utmost sacrifice to get rid of political subjection, could not be kept in fetters for long, and the British rulers realized soon after the termination of the last great Europeon war, that it was beyond their power to keep India in bondage any longer. They had ruled India with the help of Indian magistrates, Indian army and Indian police, and there were indications enough to show that patriotism and the spirit of disaffection against foreign rule was fast spreading amongst the personnel of men of all ranks. They were wise to read the signs of the times, and so on August 15, 1947, they voluntarily abdicated in favour of India. India became a free country on this memorable date.

Mahātmā Gāndhī worked not only for political freedom; he also carried on a ceaseless compaign against untouchability, which was the negation of the noble doctrines of Hinduism. His efforts in this direction are bearing fruit, and sooner than most people expect, it will be a thing of the past, and this great blot on Hinduism will be removed for ever.

With the same vehemence, Mahātmā Gāndhī expressed his view against child marriage, enforced widowhood and other disabilities and injustice from which the Indian women suffered. "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights," he wrote in *Young India*, Oct. 17, 1929, "I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality." He was even against the use of the term weaker sex in relation to women. "To call woman the weaker sex" he remarked, in *ibid*, April 10, 1930, "is a libel, it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior." According to him all passages in the *Dharma-Śāstras*, which inculcate untouchability, or disparage woman are of no value in the present age, and have to be rejected without any hesitation. In the past, the Smṛtis changed from time to time to suit the new conditions. There is, therefore, no reason why the latest Smṛtis should be regarded as binding for all times to come.

Mahātmā Gāndhī laid the greatest emphasis on truth and non-violence. Not only the relations of man to man were to be determined by these principles, but even the nations were to eschew violence and falsehood in the mutual settlement of their problems. Gāndhī was perhaps the first person in the history of man, who advocated, that international disputes should be settled on the basis of

the same moral laws, as govern the relations of human beings of each civilized nation. There is no doubt, that the teachings of Gāndhī in this respect are having a most beneficial effect on international discussions in the present age.

He was an intensely religious man. His faith in God was deep and unflinching. He felt the presence of God everywhere, and completely surrendered himself to His will in all of his activities. He held his prayer meetings in the morning and in the evening everyday without any exception, and thousands of people gathered at these meetings. His mode of worship consisted of prayer, recitation of devotional songs and readings from scriptures. He was not against idol-worship, but he himself did not feel the need of an idol for the worship of God. His worship was always conducted in the open, in the presence of thousands of devout men and women of all religions. He did not believe, as is apparent from his comment on a verse in the fourth chapter of *Bhagavad-Gītā*, that God takes on a human form for the redemption of the world. He did not regard Rāma and Kṛṣṇa as incarnations of God, but as human beings possessed of great spiritual power.

Revival of Ancient Aryan Spirit

Spenglar, some years ago propounded a theory in his monumental work, *Decline of the West*, in regard to the rise and fall of world-cultures. According to him cultures like biological organism

are born at particular epochs, pass through the stages of growth, maturity and old age and finally become extinct, giving place to new cultures. It does not seem to be wholly correct, in view of the recurrent periods of renaissance, which have followed the periods of decline in the long history of Indian culture. We are witnessing a similar phenomenon of renaissance in the modern period. After the period of decadence, lasting for almost a thousand years, the Indian culture is being rejuvenated, and is acquiring the vigour and vitality, which characterised the culture of Vedic period, thousands of years ago.

Thanks to the work of the great reformers of the modern age and the vivifying influence of Western thought, we are emerging into an era of noble endeavour and social justice all round. "To understand the achievements of the present renaissance in the field of social reform" says D. S. Sharma, "We have only to compare the state of Hindu society today with what it was about a hundred years ago. Today Satī has become an incredible thing of the past. Women are being educated. Child marriages have become illegal, widow marriages have been made possible. Polygamy has become extremely rare. Foreign travel has become very common. The ban against inter-dining has been lifted. The caste system has become less rigid. And, thanks to Mahātmā Gāndhī, the demon of untouchability has been overthrown."[1] It was written in 1944, since then, after India became a free country in 1947,

1. *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, p. 637.

great reforms have been initiated in all fields of national activity, and it seems that within a short time, we shall take our place among the most advanced nations of the world.

Once again, the life on earth has become an object of interest to us. It is really strange that for centuries preceding the modern period, we attached undue importance to other-worldliness and a life of renunciation. It was a natural reaction to the conditions of political subjection and helplessness, amidst which we had to live for a long period. That period of darkness is over, and we find modern India taking deep interest in all schemes of moral and material welfare. One five-year plan has been successfully completed, and the second plan is going to be put into operation. We are steadily moving forward on the path of economic prosperity. The enthusiasm of the people has been roused and there is no doubt, that if we continue going ahead at the present rate, we shall, after twenty years or so, get rid of unemployment and poverty, ignorance and disease, and shall be on a fair way to catch up with advanced countries like U.S.A., England and Russia in respect of economic welfare of the people. Our great schemes and projects are underway. When they are completed we shall have abundance of water and power at our disposal to provide an unlimited scope for agricultural and industrial development resulting in all round prosperity.

We now do not regard this life on earth as an

ordeal to be escaped from. The world does not now appear as a wretched cycle of births and deaths, but as a place of beauty and enjoyment, a fit place for the sons of man to live in. The people gifted with knowledge and talents are in no mood to keep aloof from that world and to devote themselves solely to a life of contemplation, with a view to attain individual salvation. They are rather eager to use their gifts in the service of the people, during the active part of their lives. Of the ancient fourfold classification of the goals of life, Artha (wealth) and Kāma (enjoyment) are being given their due place alongwith Dharma (morality) and Mokṣa (religious worship). An integrated view of life is once again coming into favour among the educated and thoughtful people.

The life of activity is finding its expression in all fields of life. Schools and colleges are being opened on a vast scale. Greater emphasis is being laid on mass education and a time will soon come, when education would be made compulsory for all and there would be no illiterate man or woman in any part of the country. In the field of literature, a larger number of good books on poetry, drama, fiction, short story etc. are being produced every year in all important Indian languages. Bengalee literature has made a great progress under the inspiration of writers like Rabīndra Nāth Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Śarat Chandra Chatterjee, Michal Sūdan Datta and a host of other good writers. Hindi, which is now the national language of India, is also going ahead and can claim a

large number of writers of great originality and merit. More or less the same can be said of many other Indian languages.

The Indian Government is doing its best to encourage fine arts in every way. Various Art-Academies have been established, and prizes and medals are awarded to the musicians, the painters and other artists on the score of their performances. There are Art-Schools in all states to impart instruction in the fine arts. Dr. Coomarswamy and Havell have, by means of their writings, revived interest in the ancient art of India. The art of dancing has been greatly perfected and the well-known artists in dancing like Udaya Śaṅkara, Rāma Gopāla, Rukmiṇī Devī and others have won world-wide fame by their beautiful performances. There are many institutions like Śānti-Niketan, where the cultivation of fine arts is receiving the greatest attention.

The progress in science is no less remarkable. A large number of national laboratories have been established, where research work on various subjects is being conducted. India has already produced a large number of great scientists, like C. V. Raman, Meghanād Sāha, Sir Jagadīśa Chandra Bosa, Dr. Bīrabala Sāhney, Dr. Śānti Sarūpa Bhatanāgara, Shri Bhābā and many others, some of whom have been made the Fellows of Royal Society of London, on account of their great contributions to science. Some of the most notable advances in Physics, Mathematics and the Biological science are

due to the work of the Indian scientists. Sir Egerton, a leading British scientist said in a meeting held recently in London, "Under the stimulus of Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the development of the whole scientific organization in India has been remarkable ... ... During the five years following independence twelve new laboratories were completed, equipped and established, 328 researches were financed, 207 Indian patents and 21 foreign patents were filed, and over a thousand research papers communicated. The creation of this chain of laboratories in so short time and the organization it has involved is a fine achievement."[1]

Philosophy has not lagged behind. India has in modern times produced a number of philosophers, who have written very good books in Philosophy. The histories of Indian Philosophy by Prof. S. N. Das Gupta and Dr. Rādhākṛṣṇan have drawn world-wide attention and made the concepts of Indian Philosophy familiar to the Western readers. The greatness of the ancient philosophy of India has been brought home to the West by the effort of these noble sons of India, especially as a result of the lucid and impressive writings of Dr. Rādhākṛṣṇan. On account of his great eminence as a philosopher, Dr. Rādhākṛṣṇan was appointed as the Professor of Indian Philosophy and Ethics at the University of Oxford, and he has won a great renown both in the

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1. *The Tribune*, May, 21, 1955.

East and the West by his remarkable philosophical contributions.

The Position of Women

The Constitution of free India gaurantees equality to all citizens of India irrespective of caste, creed or sex. In the light of this new orientation, every effort is being made to remove all those disabilities, which have affected Indian womanhood so long. The improvement in the position of women began with the dissemination of female education in the last decade of the 19th century. In Bengal, the Brahma-Samāja and Īśvara Chandra Vidyāsāgara did a great deal for the education of girls. In about 1895 the Ārya-Samāja entered the field of social reform and its contribution to female education and to raising the status of women, especially in Northern India has perhaps been the greatest, among all modern movements. Schools and colleges for women began to be opened in all parts of India and it led to a great awakening among the women of India. In 1919, the right of voting in political elections was given to women and in 1935, a number of seats were reserved in all provincial legislatures for women members Some years before this an All-India Women's Conference was organized, which has since then carried on a vigorous campaign for the rights of women, and has done a most useful work in this field.

True to the spirit of the Constitution, the Indian Government has made laudable attempts to raise

women to the condition of equality with men in all political and social matters. In 1948 women were granted the right to compete in the I.A.S. examination for the highest administrative posts. It would not be wrong to say that the Indian women enjoy at present greater political rights than the women of many advanced countries of the West. Some of the distinguished women of India have held, and are holding the positions of Foreign Ambassadors, Governors of States, Cabinet Ministers, and other high dignitaries. The culmination was reached in May 1955 by the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act. Polygamy has been made a crime, and inter-caste marriages have been allowed. This law is a great departure from the centuries-old custom of India, which has all along given an inferior position to women. Another law is at the present moment before the Parliament of India which aims at bringing the property-rights of women at par with those of men. We thus find that the womanhood of India is being rapidly restored to a position of equality with man.

Caste System and Untouchability

The caste system in the past manifested itself in the form of hereditary occupations, ban on inter-dining and inter-marriage. Out of these three distinguishing features of caste system, the first two are practically abolished, any person of any caste can follow any occupation he likes without any restriction whatsoever. In the eye of the law, all Indians are

equal and the same civil and criminal code applies to all of them. The law makes no distinction between a Brāhmaṇa and an untouchable. Inter-dining is also becoming common from year to year. Caste restrictions are no longer a serious or an insoluble problem. In fact in many homes, the member of the lower classes are employed as servants or even as cooks. The caste system at present exists chiefly in the form of a ban on inter-caste marriages.

Recently the Indian Parliament has passed the Marriage Act. According to it all inter-caste marriages are valid. The law-givers in previous centuries have all along frowned on such marriages. So strongly did they condemn inter-caste marriages, that the latter practically disappeared from the 10th century onwards. Law no longer stands in the way of such marriages. People are now free to contract Pratiloma or Anuloma form of marriage according to their liking. If any thing stands in the way, it is only the inertia of an age-long custom ; but if law has stepped aside, it would not take long for the custom to adjust itself to changed circumstances. We thus find, that all the props of caste system are disappearing one by one. No profession is banned to any person. What a Brāhmaṇa can do, the Śūdra can also do, and there is no legal disability whatsoever. Similarly the law allows a Brāhmaṇa male to marry a Śūdra woman and a Śūdra male to marry a Brāhmaṇa woman.

Untouchability has been made a crime. We

already know from previous discussions, how the classes of Śūdras and untouchables arose. Through the whole course of Indian culture, these classes have held inferior position in Hindu society. It is only in the modern period, since India freed herself from British control, that this age-long problem is on the way to a complete solution. In the eye of the law, there is no untouchable, and the Indian Government is making special efforts to improve the lot of all depressed classes. It is only for these classes, that seats have been reserved in Central and State Legislative Assemblies, and a fixed percentage in Government appointments. No tuition fees are charged from Harijan students in any part of India, and in addition stipends and scholarships are awarded to them. Nobody can prevent them from entering into public parks and temples, and from using any public property, on terms of perfect equality with other citizens of India. No hotel-keeper can refuse them food or drink in the same vessels as are used for serving other people. It should be expected that as a result of these drastic measures caste system and untouchability would very soon become things of the past and all the citizens of India will march ahead shoulder to shoulder in a spirit of equality and fraternity.

To the present writer, all these developments mark the resurgence of the sturdy spirit of the ancient Vedic Aryans. The Vedic spirit was the spirit of progressiveness, of expansion and of

experimentation in all fields of human endeavour. It gave birth to great religious, philosophical, and ethical concepts, and to a democratic conception of government. The Vedic age presents to us a procession of heroic and noble minded men and women like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Sītā, Sāvitrī, and many others whose memory will ever remain green, and serve as a perpetual source of inspiration to all succeeding generations. They were great people, full of joy and laughter of life and equally dedicated to the life of Dharma and righteousness.

We similarly find in modern India, the revival of the buoyancy of spirit, an increasing repulsion from other-worldliness and life of inaction, the growth of a deep interest in the affairs of the world and a desire to ameliorate all aspects of life. It appears that the present phase of Indian culture is the rightful heir to the ancient Vedic culture, of course enriched with the valuable elements, which it picked up on its way in the succeeding centuries.

We made many new experiments, evolved many new concepts in the field of religion, philosophy and science, and enriched our conception of life in many new ways. We followed many wrong clues also, as the result of which, our social life became clogged with poisonous growths, which took us far away from the ideals, animating our ancestors of the Vedic times. Our religious leaders and thinkers owe it to the masses to place before them the best elements of Hindu culture, and at the same time to wean them

from the superstitious beliefs and undesirable practices and customs in which they have been allowed to wallow so long.

There is an important aspect of modern age, which may cause some misgivings in the minds of most people. The ancient Aryans were a highly devout people, professing deep faith in the divine powers, whom they had come to regard as the manifestation of one supreme reality. The educated Hindu youngmen of the present age are being adversely affected by the non-religious doctrines emanating from the West. It is a moot point, whether the present descendants of the ancient Aryans would be able, under the influence of adverse environmental forces, to retain the religious faith of their ancestors, or will go the way of the West in affecting indifference to the spiritual values of life. There are, however, reasons to believe that the inherently deep-rooted religious faith will rise triumphant over materialistic forces. India has in recent years given birth to great religious teachers like Dayānanda, Tagore, Aarabinda Ghoṣa, Parama-Haṁsa, Rāma Kṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda, Maharṣi Raman and many others, whose profound religious thought is influencing not only the people of India but of other countries as well. We can very well hope that, instead of there being a clash between the material and spiritual values, a reconciliation is going to be effected between these two important aspects of life, as was the case in ancient India of Vedic times.

Main Characteristics of Hinduism

The spirit of toleration has characterized the Indian culture from very ancient times. The Vedic Aryans, though eager to convert the non-Aryans to the Aryans mode of worship and belief, did not try to force their culture upon them. They allowed them to hold on to their beliefs, and worship their gods in their own way. In fact there was a free exchange of ideas, beliefs, practices and customs, till all distinctions between the Aryan and non-Aryan beliefs and modes of worship were obliterated, and the non-Aryans came to be assimilated into the Aryan fold. The Aryan culture has remained singularly free from religious fanaticism and persecution through all the centuries of its evolution. Its implicit faith is, that truth has many facets and God can be worshipped in more ways than one. It does not, however, regard all beliefs and modes of worship as of equal rank and worth, though it is altogether against forcing one's beliefs and ways on other people. But at a certain stage of its evolution, the religious leaders of Hinduism gave currency to the erroneous view, that all beliefs and practices were equally good, and no efforts were made thereafter to point out to the masses the difference between genuine religious faith and the mass of supertitious and unwholesome practices, which mostly constituted the religion of the common people. It is to be hoped, that the spread of education among the masses, and the active efforts of religious teachers, will make

avilable the higher religion to all followers of Hinduism.

Other valuable characteristics of Hinduism, which have helped it to survive the vicissitudes of time are its power of adoption to new circumstances, and its readiness to assimilate the best elements of alien cultures. When new circumstances made their appearance, we adjusted ourselves to them, and made the necessary changes in our attitudes, customs and beliefs. Rigid and inflexible cultures cannot keep themselves alive under changed conditions. In making these adjustments, we did not hesitate to adopt good things from other people; but we made them our own. They became a part of our constitution and of our very being. We owe many things to different sources, but they have been so completely assimilated, that it is not easily possible now to refer them to their sources. No nation can claim absolute wisdom. At certain epochs we shut ourselves within our shells, and refused to learn from others. They were periods of our downfall. Of one such periods, Alberuni makes mention in his memorable book on India. He speaks of Indians as "haughty, foolishly vain, self-contained and stolid. They think, that there is no country like theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no science like theirs." This was in 1000 A. D. when Mahmud of Ghazni was over-running North India. But this is not the usual attitude of Indian culture towards foreign ideas and achievements. Ever since the Vedic age, we have adopted and assimilated so many things from

other peoples ; from the Dravidians, the Muslims and more recently from the British, that our culture has undergone a phenomenal change through all these centuries. It has led to the enrichment of our culture in all respects, Perhaps that is the reason, why within a short period of eight years after the attainment of freedom, we have made a remarkable success of our experiment in democracy and are making a steady progress in all directions. No hampering influence of of any fixed tradition, or attitude towards life stands in the way of the success of our experiment. We are emerging as a great nation and are going to take our place among the most advanced nations of the world within a short time.





